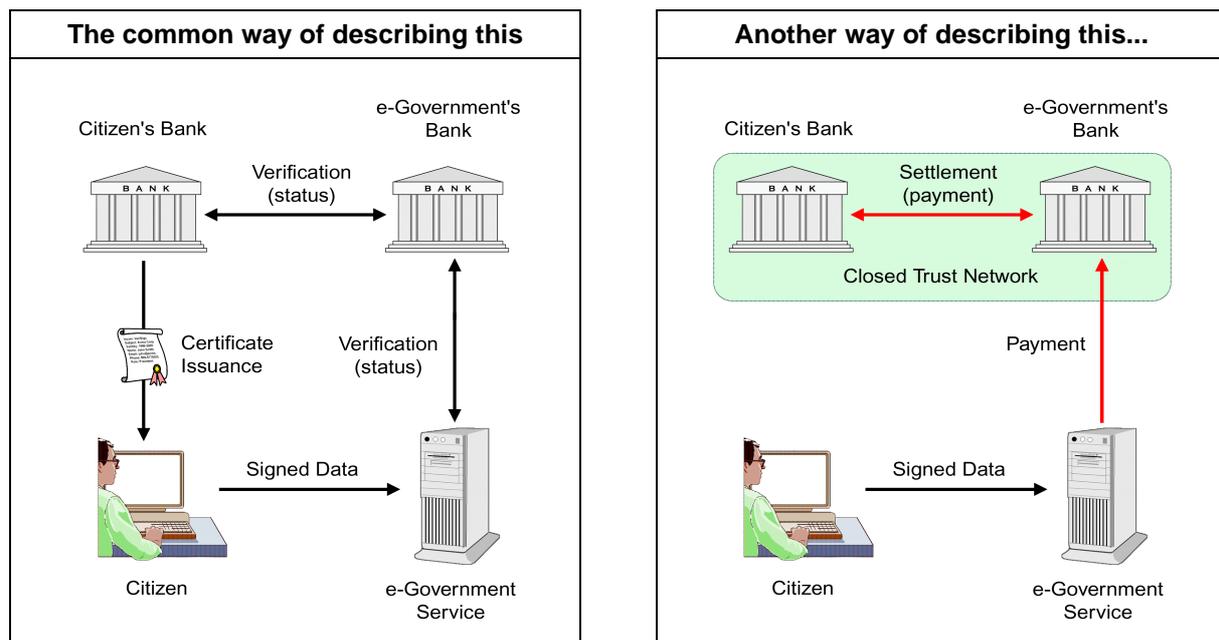


A Note Regarding Citizen Identification Services for e-Governments

The following highlights a *rather controversial issue* that definitely does not represent *current* e-government agendas.

However, some *decisions taken today can in fact have a major impact on tomorrow*.

Many e-governments have signed-up external ID-providers like banks to cater for things like digital certificates for citizens. As banks' natural "habitat" is money, they have in most cases "converted" these ID-services into something, which is conceptually very similar to payment systems. In Sweden to take an example, citizen certificates are free and distributed from the on-line banks directly to the end-users' PCs. The "receivers" (the e-government authorities) on the other hand, pay something like 0.25 EUR for each status-check. This level is "inspired" by the cost of an ordinary postal stamp. I believe this cost may thwart some more frequent e-government services, but that's *another* story.



The *future* problem I see with this is, that without a de-facto monopoly like VISA, it will be hard to process and accept signed messages crossing the borders of these usually only regional, national, or commercial "trust-networks". Some of these trust networks even make it impossible to *verify* signatures, as only "valid" (paying) receivers are allowed to get the CA-root. Only in Sweden, there are four *competing* trust-networks, each requiring a contract with the receiver as well as having their own transaction fees and proprietary technical solutions.

Unless one see a value in creating a global ID monopoly (or more likely, create a lot of disjunct "payment-systems" which do not scale), financed by tax-money, I think that governments should rather pay ID-providers for issuing citizen certificates using a fixed or subscriber-based "cost-model". *A further advantage of that is that private enterprises could then without hesitation use the same infrastructure.* Due to the fact that no matter what you do, e-government ID-systems will be tax-financed, *there is little reason for imposing usability limitations at this early stage.*

Long-term, *I see a possibility that citizens may actually directly pay something like 10-20 EUR yearly* for owning a universal electronic identity, but that requires numerous of useful e-government and other services, as well as a standardized mobile "container" to carry IDs in. Such a switch may take another 5 years to become technically and commercially feasible.