



Plan to avoid traffic jams using cell phones

Henry K. Lee, Chronicle Staff Writer
Thursday, June 26, 2008

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State and federal transportation officials unveiled plans Wednesday to reduce traffic congestion in the Bay Area by giving drivers real-time information through their cell phones.

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Later this year, officials will begin a six-month experiment monitoring the cell phones - equipped with Global Positioning Systems - used by 10,000 volunteer commuters and transit vehicles within a 200-mile radius. The data, such as how long it takes to get from Point A to Point B, will be sent to a radio monitoring device and traffic management centers.

If the test goes well, commuters could soon use their cell phones to plan routes, consider whether to take mass transit and to avoid gridlock caused by crashes and broken-down cars, officials from Caltrans, the federal Department of Transportation and UC Berkeley said at a news conference at the congested Bay Bridge toll plaza.

"Imagine, if you will, taking this device - your cell phone - walking out to your vehicle and having it basically tell you that you're better off taking transit that morning," said Paul Brubaker, administrator of the federal Transportation Department's Research and Innovative Technology Administration.

Transportation officials said they opted to use existing technology - almost everyone has a cell phone nowadays - rather than creating devices from scratch.

John Shen, head of the Nokia Research Center in Palo Alto, said, "If you have enough devices that can provide you GPS information, you can re-create the actual traffic flow. You can either use voice or a touch-screen to request traffic information for you." The experiment will be especially helpful in areas where the roads aren't equipped with embedded sensors, officials said.

The goal is to "not only save you time, but to save energy and to save fuel," said Randy Iwasaki, chief deputy director of Caltrans.

The \$12.4 million partnership includes Caltrans, the federal Transportation Department, Nokia, Nissan, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority, and other segments of both the public and private sector.

The project is being funded by in-kind contributions from various participants as well as a \$2.9 million federal grant, said Caltrans spokeswoman Lauren Wonder.

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Lets all not to forget the new California cell phone law while driving. This seems ill timed if you don't have hands free. Good luck.

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That's rich! A lot of traffic congestion is already caused by accidents. So now they're going to distract drivers even more by sending message to their &%^\$ cell phones, which they must read and therefore take their eyes off the road, which leads to more accidents, which leads to more traffic congestion, etc. etc.

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