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Researchers' New GPS Software Could Get Drivers Out of a Jam

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It's bumper-to-bumper on Interstate 880 and there's a meeting in 10 minutes. Drivers with cell phones that have a built-in GPS systems, the new Mobile Millennium software spearheaded by a UC Berkeley professor, can now navigate the fastest way out of traffic.

Starting at midnight Monday, users can download the software onto their cell phones to get immediate and real-time traffic information. Alexandre Bayen, a UC Berkeley assistant professor in the department of civil and environmental engineering, and a group of graduate students led the research project in collaboration with Nokia and Navteq.

"What we hope to achieve is gather enough information where there is currently nothing," Bayen said. "All we know is the speeds on the highway but not on the streets."

When cell phone users download the software they become part of a data network in which each user's speed is collected into a larger pool of data. This data is then evaluated using the algorithms designed by the research team, to provide the commuter with a prediction of how long it will take to drive from one point to another.

"Institutionally, we want to understand how users react to downloading this application," said Thomas West, the director of UC Berkeley's California Center for Innovative Transportation, which brought together UC Berkeley, Nokia and Navteq.

The release today is one of the next steps in the team's research process to refine its data model. The researchers hope that in about six months, 10,000 people will have downloaded the software, giving the team enough data to provide a more accurate representation of traffic.



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The researchers have been working on this project for one year and tested their prototype last February by having 100 UC Berkeley students drive on the highway using the software.

"Other people (played) with GPS systems before and traffic before. Nobody has put it together the way that Nokia and Berkeley has," said Ken Tracton, a member of the Nokia research team.

Some commuters said the new technology won't be helpful to everyone.

"To me, no, this won't be helpful because I don't have a GPS on my cell. If you have a GPS on your cell phone, then it could be helpful," said commuter Dan Barba.

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