SEARCH ● SFGate ○ Web Search by YAHOO! | Advanced Search   Sign In | Register

| Home | News | Sports | Business | Entertainment | Food | Living | Travel | Columns | Classifieds | Jobs | Real Estate | Cars | Index |

Technology | Markets | Small Business | Chron 200 | Real Estate

Cell phones part of traffic monitoring network

Michael Cabanatuan, Chronicle Staff Writer
Monday, November 10, 2008

PRINT   E-MAIL   SHARE   COMMENTS (19)   FONT | SIZE: − +   TOOLS SPONSOR: verizon wireless

(11-09) 18:27 PST -- Cell phones are often derided for distracting drivers, causing accidents or slowing traffic. But beginning Monday, cell phones could help speed traffic - or at least give drivers a better idea of how long it will take to get where they're going.

IMAGES

Jeff Chiu / AP

⊕ View Larger Image

MORE TECHNOLOGY

- EBay's tweaks for sellers part of changes to site 04.14.09
- Recession knocks VC funds to 5 1/2-year low 04.14.09
- Micro cars get poor marks in collision tests 04.14.09

Just before midnight tonight, researchers from UC Berkeley and Nokia will release free software that can be downloaded to Global Positioning System-enabled phones that run on GSM networks such as AT&T and T-Mobile.

The software will transform the phones into devices that are used to monitor and measure traffic - and show real-time traffic data. The system is similar to the Bay Area's 511 system, which relies in large part on FasTrak toll tags.

But because it uses cell phones, it could dramatically improve the accuracy of driving time projections, and allow driving time estimates on less-traveled roads, including surface streets and rural highways, the researchers say.

"This technology has the potential to provide better quality coverage over more area than has ever been monitored before, allowing motorists to make better traveling decisions," Randell Iwasaki, Caltrans chief deputy director, said in a news release.

As the phones - and their drivers - pass locations marked with certain GPS coordinates, they will automatically relay anonymous speed and location information to computers, which will crunch the data, determine speeds and travel times, and send the information to motorists' phones. The information will also be posted online.

Privacy plays a key part in the project, according to the researchers. Safeguards are built into the system to prevent data from being linked to a particular phone. Drivers will also have the ability to turn off the system at any time.

The pilot program, which will allow a limited number of participants to download the software, is supported by the U.S. Department of Transportation and Caltrans. The concept was initially tested nine months ago when students in 100 cars outfitted with GPS phones drove back and forth on a 10-mile stretch of Interstate 880 between Hayward and Fremont.

"Eventually," Alexandre Bayen, a UC Berkeley professor of systems engineering, said in a statement, "anyone in the country will be able to download the free software to transmit and receive traffic data and participate in the creation of a new traffic information system for their city or community."

The traffic monitoring software can be downloaded, and speed and driving time projections viewed, at *traffic.berkeley.edu.*

E-mail Michael Cabanatuan at mcabanatuan@sfchronicle.com.

This article appeared on page ***B - 1*** *of the San Francisco Chronicle*

PRINT | E-MAIL | SHARE | Buzz up!

Comments (19) View Comments »

Share your thoughts on this story.

Add Your Comment
You must be signed in to add a comment. Sign In | Register

Submit

Most Recommended Comments

fast_r6 11/9/2008 9:39:50 PM
big brother is watching you!

Recommend: 👍 (24) 👎 (29) [Report Abuse]

alekaneleno 11/10/2008 8:21:17 AM
Has anyone else noticed that significant numbers of drivers are ignoring the hands-free law? This needs to be tightened up by including a presumption of guilt or culpability if there's an accident involving the illegal use of a cell phone.

Recommend: 👍 (23) 👎 (5) [Report Abuse]

westadd04 11/10/2008 8:18:21 AM
A lot of people don't realize that any cell powered on cell phone's location is always known, i.e. tracked. Big brother is already watching you! What's wrong with the current traffic data system that tracks everyone's FasTrak transponder?

Recommend: 👍 (19) 👎 (5) [Report Abuse]

View Comments (19)

INSIDE SFGATE

Bad In The Crunch
Micro cars are great at the pump, lousy in crash tests.

Warning: Real World Ahead
Congrats, grads. Now meet your prospects.

Makeover At 97
The first city-owned streetcar is getting a $1.9M fix. **Photos.**

Subscribe to The Chronicle

Home | News | Sports | Business | Entertainment | Food | Living | Travel | Columns | Classifieds | Jobs | Real Estate | Cars | Site Index   [return to top]

Advertising Services: Place a Classified | Advertise in Print | Advertise Online | Media Kit | Public Notices
Reader Services: Home Delivery | Subscribers | Mobile | RSS Feeds | Newsletters | Feedback | Buy Photos | FAQ | Corrections | Get Us
Company Info: Contact Us | Hearst Corp. | Privacy Policy | Terms and Conditions | Work for Us | Chronicle in Education | Events & Promotions | Submissions

© 2009 Hearst Communications Inc.
HEARST newspapers