Nokia Experiment Turns Phones Into Traffic Sensors

By Priya Ganapati ✉   November 10, 2008 | 4:29:49 PM   Categories: GPS

Nokia Research is offering free real time traffic information to users with GPS-enabled mobile devices.

The Mobile Millenium project, which Nokia is developing along with researchers from the University of California at Berkeley, will be available to people as part of a pilot project aimed at collecting and studying traffic data. Currently it covers the greater Bay Area in California; users can download the software for free starting midnight Monday.

"Traffic is very common problem anywhere in the world and it affects issues such as energy consumption and carbon footprint," says Henry Tirri, vice president and head of Nokia Research Center. "We want to show what you can do with pervasive sensing of the environment through millions of phones that people carry every day."

Nokia says it believes a community of users with GPS-equipped mobile devices can help reduce traffic by enabling drivers to make better decisions.

The first phase of the system will include traffic data for highways and will be expanded to include arterial routes. By April 2009, researchers expect to reach the estimated pilot system capacity of 10,000 users.

Real time traffic information through collaborative gathering of the data is the latest trend in GPS navigation.

Traditional traffic monitoring systems currently use pavement-embedded sensors, roadside radar detectors and cameras to provide data. A connected community of mobile devices sending data back could be more efficient than these fixed sensors, say researchers.

The approach is similar to what Sunnyvale, California-based Dash Navigation has been doing with its Dash

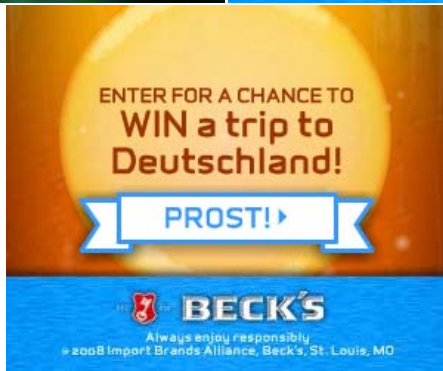device. However, last week the company killed its GPS device business and decided to license its software instead.

The Mobile Millennium traffic data is based in part on the backbone technology of Navteq, a mapping data supplier. Nokia acquired Navteq last year for $8.1 billion.

In its latest project, Nokia says the user-generated data is completely anonymous. Researchers are protecting personal data by stripping individual device identifiers from the transmitted traffic data, by using strong encryption and by drawing data only from targeted roadways where traffic information is needed.

Nokia is also evaluating similar projects elsewhere in the country and potentially expanding it to countries like India, says Tirri.

Photo: (richardmasoner/Flickr)

Thanks for the photo attribution.

On reading about this my first thought was how would it hose things up if I put this on my phone? I ride Caltrain to work every day.

Posted by: Richard Masoner | **Nov 11, 2008 10:34:26 AM**

I hope they take into account the results of this story (http://www.economist.com/science/displaystory.cfm?story_id=12202559) when designing their algorithms...

Posted by: Juan Nunez-Iglesias | **Nov 11, 2008 5:13:24 PM**

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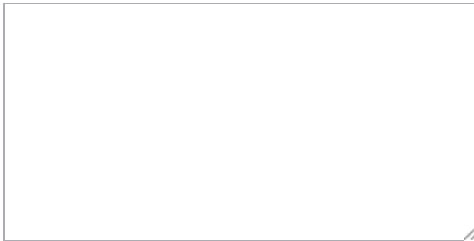
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