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Volunteers Sought for Real-Time Traffic Project

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Traffic information provider NAVTEQ and phone manufacturer Nokia are moving forward with a partnership to bring accurate real-time traffic reporting to the cell phone.

Cars at the Mobile Century command center in Union City, Calif. The drivers carried GPS-enabled cellphones that transmitted speed and position information to researchers at the command center, creating a nearly real-time picture of traffic flow. (Credit: Paul Kirchner Studios)

Throw in a two more partners, the University of California-Berkeley's California Center for Innovative Transportation and the California Department of Transportation, and you have the project called "Mobile Millennium."

The goal of the project is to use mobile phones to collect traffic data, creating the most widespread, most accurate traffic reporting system in the world.

The way it works is that Nokia phones with GPS are used as probes, anonymously reporting back to the network its speed and position. The information will build an accurate database of traffic conditions, even on smaller side roads.

Does that have a familiar ring? Yes, Dash Navigator did it first, but Dash announced it will no longer make GPS units. Instead it will sell its service for other devices.

The test will be restricted to the San Francisco Bay area for four to six months. The project is aiming for 10,000 volunteers and will accept anyone with a BlackBerry Curve 8310 or Pearl 8110, an unlocked Nokia E71, N95, N96, or E61i with an external GPS. Other BlackBerry and Java-enabled phones, may work, but the project warns that you try at your own risk.

People who sign up as probes will get real-time traffic updates for their trouble. To volunteer, go to http://traffic.berkeley.edu/pilot/.