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Uni students get stuck in traffic for Nokia

By Kevin Massy on 12 February 2008

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It's not often that you get people volunteering to get stuck in traffic. However, that's exactly what happened last week in Northern California.

About 150 students from the University of California at Berkeley participated a project devised to test the potential of using GPS-enabled, internet-connected mobile phones as aids for reporting real-time information on traffic congestion. The test by the university was done in collaboration with Nokia, and the California Transportation Department.

Real-time traffic services are nothing new in the United States and Europe. In America, services from satellite radio companies, such as XM and Sirius, as well as maps from Google and Yahoo provide colour-coded estimates of traffic flow and congestion in certain major urban areas. The trouble is these data feeds rely on a complex infrastructure of roadside and pavement-mounted sensors and cameras, which cost a lot of money to install and maintain. As our colleagues in the States found in recent field test, they're also not always completely accurate. This project, known as "Mobile Century", was designed to test the accuracy and viability of using a network of specially programmed Nokia N95 smartphones as anonymously-reporting probes in a real-world traffic environment.



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In the driver's seat

UC Berkeley provided a supply of test drivers who were sent out in three teams with different assigned routes. Cars were sent out in waves of three vehicles per minute. About 150 people in 100 cars participated in this event.

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