Nokia shows off real-time traffic application

by **[Marguerite Reardon](#)**

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NEW YORK--GPS map maker Navteq is teaming with its parent company Nokia to help drivers get more accurate information about traffic conditions.

Before **[Nokia bought Navteq](#)** last year, the two began working on a project in conjunction with the University of California at Berkeley called **[Mobile Millennium](#)** that uses **[GPS](#)**-enabled **[cell phones](#)** as traffic monitors or "probes" to collect real-time traffic data.

A pilot program using more than 10,000 handsets has **[already launched in the San Francisco Bay Area](#)**. And on Tuesday the companies were showing off the technology at the Intelligent Transport Systems World Congress here in New York.

As part of the pilot program, researchers are collecting data via GPS and tracking usage patterns to provide real-time traffic reports for individual drivers. All the information is collected anonymously and aggregated statistically to provide the most up-to-date and accurate information.

A Nokia GPS-enabled phone acts as a traffic "probe" to provide real-time traffic information to drivers.
(Credit: Marguerite Reardon/CNET News)

"The beauty of this approach is that the users also become contributors and the more data that is collected the better the accuracy and range of the service," said Quinn Jacobson, a research leader at the Nokia Research Center in Palo Alto, Calif.

Navteq is a leader in the mapping and navigation market. Its maps have been used by Google and others to fuel their navigation services. And its technology is already being used for cell phone services, such as Verizon Wireless' VZ Navigator. In addition to turn-by-turn

navigation, VZ Navigator also provides up-to-date traffic information.

But the problem is that most of the traffic information available through Navteq's technology is collected using government deployed sensors. While these sensors, which sit on the roads and monitor **car** speeds and traffic volume, do a good job, they are too expensive to be deployed everywhere. This means that traffic information is usually only available for busy highways in large metropolitan areas, but it's missing on arterial roads feeding into these highways or on rural secondary roads.

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The application being developed in the Mobile Millennium project will solve this problem, Jacobson said.

Currently, the Mobile Millennium application is only being used in the pilot testing program, but Jacobson said he expects a commercial offering to be available within the next two years. It's not clear yet if Nokia will make the application available to phones other than ones made by Nokia. It's likely that the application could be made available as part of a service offered through a wireless operator. This would likely mean that it would be available on a wide range of handsets from other manufacturers.

Jacobson said those business details haven't been worked out, but it's technically possible to offer the application on any GPS device. Jacobson also emphasized that the application performs better with more users, which means it might be in Nokia's best interest to open it up to other devices.

"The application works really well with 2 percent of the drivers on the road using it," he said. "But 4 percent is even better and so on."

Jacobson said the application will become really useful when it allows users to input specific routes and is integrated with other applications. For example, a daily commuter could program into the phone several routes he drives to work. The traffic application would be able to choose the best route depending on the current traffic conditions. If something changes en route, the application would be smart enough to alter the route.

And for people who never leave themselves enough time to get to the airport or an important meeting, the traffic application could help. Once the application is integrated into the calendar, it could calculate how long it will take, based on current traffic conditions, to get to that appointment. And it could alert the user when he or she should leave in order to get there on time.

Marguerite Reardon has been a CNET News reporter since 2004, covering cell phone services, broadband, citywide Wi-Fi, the Net neutrality debate, as well as the ongoing consolidation of the phone companies. E-mail Maggie.

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