

Can IT solutions solve traffic woes?

By Russ Banham - [Tech Page One](#) February 19 2014

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It's the scourge of humanity, the cause of untold misery and the source of erratic, even dangerous behavior. No, not "Keeping Up with the Kardashians." Traffic.

Presently the average driver [loses eight working days a year to traffic congestion](#), but data analysts at French electricity distributor [Schneider Electric](#) are optimistic that tomorrow's traffic will get better, not worse.



Schneider Electric's Cary Vick says there's reason to believe that traffic conditions as we now know them will eventually become a thing of the past.

The company is [working on IT solutions for traffic](#) that would not only provide a speedy way to get from Point A to Point B in one's automobile, but would also suggest a range of transportation alternatives to get a traveler where they need to go.

"Every metropolitan area is plagued by traffic," says Ruthbea Yesner Clarke, research director, smart cities strategies, at research firm [IDC](#). She has studied [the use of data analytics](#) to improve the movement of people from one place to another, expeditiously, safely and with less impact on the environment.

"While intelligent transportation is not a new topic," Clarke notes, "we are beginning to realize far-reaching improvements, thanks to the convergence of big data, mobile devices and GPS systems."

Go Cowboys

Not every city is realizing these advances — yet. But the future bodes well, as evidenced in Schneider Electric's groundbreaking integrated corridor management project in Dallas/Fort Worth. The company's Telvent subsidiary, acquired in 2011, specializes in IT solutions to improve mobility for citizens worldwide. Two years ago, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) awarded the company a [project](#) to help mitigate the horrific traffic on a 15-mile stretch of the

U.S. 75 highway corridor in Dallas.

"The concept of integrated management calls for multiple modes of transport like automobiles, buses, light rail and even walking, to come together to efficiently manage the movement of people," says Cary Vick, director of business development for smart mobility in the Dallas office of Schneider Electric. "Through data analytics and a platform we're providing, information can be consolidated in real time to maximize total person throughput."

He's referring to the ability to move more people to where they need to go in a more efficient, less miserable manner. To do that, the project relies on data collected from diverse sources — sensors along roadways that report on traffic density, smartphone GPS systems providing real-time traffic flow, and such information as road closures for maintenance and weather condition feeds. Sensors at the DART (Dallas Area Rapid Transit) light train "park and ride" lots even discern parking conditions.

Partners including the Texas DOT, NAVTEQ (a provider of Geographic Information Systems that is now part of Nokia), the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI), Texas A&M University and Southern Methodist University (SMU) all contribute data using various methods. NAVTEQ, for example, is [leveraging crowdsourcing techniques](#) to capture real-time traffic flow via a combination of smartphones and navigation devices.

Smooth riding

When integrated and analyzed, the feeds offer a goldmine of travel information. "This only works if we have enough data," Vick explains. "All of it is fed into our platform, which fuses the data and makes it available through a 511 site providing specialized travelers information."

Participants calling the 511 site or logging onto 511.org provide their current location and the location they would like to reach. The response varies, depending on the data analytics. Some days, it may suggest a series of roads, streets and highways via automobile; other days it may recommend multi-modal transport — a bit of driving, followed by a brief jaunt on the train and a brisk walk.

Much of the project is largely operational and running smoothly, although these improvements are yet to be quantified. (TTI is tasked with the metrics and is currently utilizing "probe" vehicles in actual traffic to measure the conditions and compare to previous studies.) But Vick says the return on investment is around 10 to one.

"The project is projected to cost around \$8 million, from which \$80 million can be expected in travel time savings, fuel savings, and such intangibles as lower emissions and enhanced quality of life," he explains.

The ongoing project is expected to continue improving traffic. Vick notes that SMU is experimenting with traffic simulations

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to provide the optimum advice on alternative routes.

“Say there is an accident on U.S. 75 in a particular location; the alternative routes would then be to move traffic west or east,” he explains. “The idea is to run a simulation on each alternative to determine the better choice.”

Will traffic conditions as we now know and hate them eventually disappear? “There’s definite cause for hope,” Vick says. “Even in Los Angeles.”

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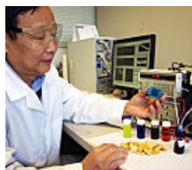
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