

*Agency applications of
information technology*

FCW AGENCY SYSTEMS

TRANSPORTATION

SmarTraveler to cut commutes

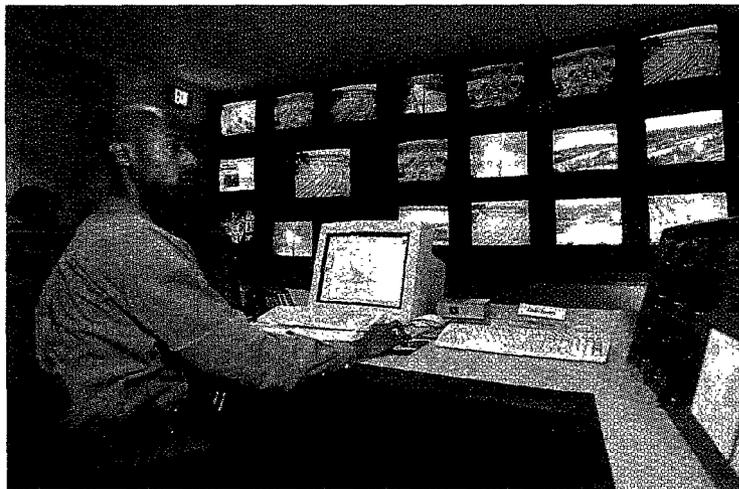
offers travelers real-time info on traffic, public transit

BY COLLEEN O'HARA

The country is one step closer to an integrated system that will monitor and control traffic on the nation's roads, now that a public/private consortium launched earlier this month a new service that will allow Washington, DC-area travelers to check real-time road and traffic conditions.

Partners in Motion, a partnership of 25 federal and state agencies and 12 private organizations, unveiled the SmarTraveler Information System, which provides area travelers with transportation information via the Internet and the telephone so that they can avoid traffic jams, road construction, accidents, bad weather and late-running buses or subway trains.

SmarTraveler, which Partners in Motion developed for \$12.2 million, allows commuters to find out the latest traffic information, weather and travel time for a specific route or a segment of that route. Coverage extends



Do You Know the Way to San Jose?

SmarTraveler provides transportation information via the Internet and phone.

to routes within a 25-mile radius from the center of Washington, D.C., as well as commuter train and bus routes coming into the region. Data on subway, bus and train services and conditions in the area also is provided.

The system, which will be replicated in cities nationwide, will become the backbone of so-called Intelligent Transportation

Systems (ITS), which include electronic toll-collection facilities, traffic signals that are controlled by computers and traveler information systems.

"This is the first step toward fully integrated intelligent transportation systems," said Mortimer Downey, deputy secretary for the Transportation

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Department. The ultimate goal is to "link different systems, technology and regions into one seamless system. We're making progress, but it requires a partnership that pulls in state and local governments."

To fund ITS, the Clinton administration proposed the National Economic Crossroads Transportation Efficiency Act, which would provide \$1.3 billion over six years in federal funds to deploy new ITS technology. The bill, which was introduced this spring, also provides \$100 million a year in small grants to metropolitan areas to help integrate ITS [FCW, March 17].

SmarTraveler collects data from various public agencies and private-sector sources, including highway cameras, aircraft surveillance, two-way radios, police scanners and private individuals. The data is sent to the SmarTraveler Information Center in Washington, D.C., integrated into the system and disseminated to commuters.

John Liebesny, president and chief technology officer for SmartRoute Systems, which is under a six-year contract to Battelle, the prime contractor for Partners in Motion, said the system is built on Microsoft Corp. Windows NT client and Microsoft SQL Server architecture. A fiber-optic link connects to the traffic management center in Arlington, Va., which sends images from Virginia Transportation Department cameras. All the data is entered into specific fields on a workstation and posted on the World Wide Web site or recorded and played back for users who call in.

Bell Atlantic NYNEX Mobile, Cellular One and Sprint Spectrum users can access SmarTraveler by dialing #211.

Within five years, Liebesny said, cars will come standard with a unit that will provide an outside wireless link to services such as SmarTraveler.

For Maryland, which has the nation's sixth-highest percentage of roads located in urban areas, easing congestion is critical. "Growth in vehicle use is up," said David Winstead, Maryland Transportation secretary. "ITS had played a major role in" the effort to address this issue.

For Washington, D.C., a major obstacle for the system is accommodating the 19 million tourists that visit the area every year. "The challenge is meeting everyone's travel needs and maintaining a quality of life in the city's neighborhoods," said Cell Bernardino, acting director of the District of Columbia Public Works.

The SmarTraveler system was used in Atlanta during the summer Olympics and is scheduled for rollout to more cities throughout the country, including New York City and Minneapolis, later this year. It is already used in Boston, Cincinnati and Philadelphia.

Travelers in Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia can call (202) 863-1313 or access the system through www.smartraveler.com.

