

# **V**ehicle **T**raffic **I**nformation **C**oalition

U.S. Department of Transportation  
Dockets Management Facility  
Room PL-401  
400 Seventh Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20590-0001

**RE: FHWA Docket No. FHWA-06-24219**

## **VEHICLE TRAFFIC INFORMATION COALITION COMMENTS ON PROVISIONS AND PARAMETERS FOR REAL-TIME SYSTEM MANAGEMENT INFORMATION PROGRAM**

The Vehicle Traffic Information Coalition (VTIC) was formed by leading auto manufacturers, navigation and technology companies in the real-time traffic data industry. VTIC members include: ESRI, Honda, Mark IV, NAVTEQ, TCS, Tele Atlas, Toyota, Traffic.com and XM Satellite. The coalition's efforts to grow the real-time traffic market will ultimately enhance the driving experience and help reduce congestion and danger on the nation's roadways.

While driver oriented products and services are among the most visible examples of the utility of real-time traffic data, it is fair to say that the intelligent transportation system is built on the foundation of high quality traffic data. Traffic management systems can not be effective without quality traffic data. Without any doubt, the driver is the most fundamental and powerful traffic management system on the road. Car, driver, road and traffic control need to work together to make our transportation system safer and more efficient. Empowering drivers with high quality traffic data make all other systems to manage traffic work better.

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) report, *Traffic Congestion and Reliability: Trends and Advanced Strategies for Congestion Mitigation*, shows that trends in congestion have increased for all city sizes over the past 20 years. This is a troubling trend that costs the nation dearly. Congestion causes productivity losses, increases driver risk, reduces the ability to save lives and reduce injury, and increases fuel consumption and pollution emissions.

VTIC is encouraged by the growing number of consumer oriented services and products which are incorporating location, navigation and traffic data. These services should be widely available throughout the nation. That will only happen with a concerted public/private effort to improve the quality and availability of real-time traffic data. The comments sought by the solicitation are a critical step in bringing together this partnership.

VTIC supports and applauds the Congress for including Section 1201 in SAFETEA-LU. We urge the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) to fully and aggressively implement this important initiative as well as support efforts to expand the collection and use of real-time traffic data.

*Questions: Does September 30, 2009 represent a reasonable time period for implementing the Real-Time System Management Information Program? What potential obstacles would prevent program implementation by this date? What would be a reasonable time frame for implementing the program?*

VTIC understands the date was arbitrarily selected to correspond with the expiration date for SAFETEA-LU. Given the exciting growth of in-vehicle traffic data technologies and the continuing rising trends in congestion, we strongly recommend a shorter time frame. U.S. DOT should immediately direct federal, state and local governments to work cooperatively with industry to expand the collection and availability of traffic data. U.S. DOT should also explicitly continue advising recipients of funds that traffic data collection and dissemination investments are eligible for most Highway bill spending categories.

*Questions: Are the proposed outcomes appropriate for gauging the success of a system implemented under the program? What other measures for success would be useful?*

There is no better measure of success than growing the number of cities where high quality real-time traffic data is available to the driving public. For example, sufficient data exists today to make real-time traffic service available to the public in many congested cities. While even in these cities data could be improved, the availability of commercial products is a good proxy for progress. VTIC would be delighted to work closely with the U.S. DOT to create a "DRIVER EMPOWERMENT INDEX" which could be used to measure real-time traffic data improvements.

The Index could measure the number of communities where *quality* real-time traffic data is available and the number of *miles* of road where data is available. The goal should be to expand the availability of real time traffic data to enhance driver applications and specialty government and commercial applications to the entire nation. A real-time traffic data element should be added to as many federal planning and build-out requirements as possible.

Real-time traffic data should be made widely available to both consumers and the industries providing real-time traffic data to consumers. State and local governments are generally the originating source of the information supply chain which ultimately makes its way to the traveling public. Information is power and driver empowerment will only be as good as the source of the information. Much work needs to be done in this regard. Even in communities acknowledged as having leading edge real-time data systems, such as Los Angeles, only 60% of the highways in that jurisdiction provide speed and flow data. Success could be claimed if that coverage increases.

State and local government also control extremely valuable traffic incident data. Making that information instantaneously available would enhance the quality of real-time traffic data. These governments should be encouraged through SAFETEA-LU and other DOT-led projects like Next Generation 911 and 511 Travel Information Service to make incident data more widely available.

By focusing on traffic data sharing which is capable of reaching the commercial market, U.S. DOT can ensure that Regional ITS Architectures are developed and updated in a way that also facilitates the sharing of data across jurisdictional boundaries.

*Question: Is this proposed definition of “major highways” adequate and appropriate for the purposes of the Real-Time System Management Information Program?*

The National Highway System is certainly the backbone of the nation’s transportation infrastructure. The inclusion of major arterials with congested travel is highly important as well. However any arterial with recurring congestion or incidents should be considered a priority for the program with the ultimate goal of nation-wide coverage. This goal is achievable if real-time traffic data collection is systematically engineered into the highway planning and construction process. VTIC’s vision statement: *Every road implemented to deliver real-time traffic data at high quality and low cost* – supports this concept.

*Question: How well do the proposed traffic and travel conditions represent reasonable and appropriate basic requirements for the Real-Time System Management Information Program?*

The proposed monitoring elements represent a good starting point for the needs of a basic system. However, the system needs to evolve from that foundation. VTIC supports incentives for states that enrich data beyond the baseline.

*Question: How well do the proposed criteria for determining real-time information represent reasonable and appropriate minimums for systems implemented under the Real-Time System Management Information Program?*

The time allotted to update real-time systems lies within the range of 10 to 30 minutes, depending on the condition being monitored. Realizing the program applies to all states and not all states currently have equal monitoring capabilities, the time frames represent a reasonable starting point, however, near instantaneous data is desirable. A real-time system with data not available virtually immediately, is not real-time. The coalition supports a forward-looking approach that takes into account providing incentives to states to “push the envelope” technologically speaking. A variety of products exist that will assist state and local governments capture data in real-time. VTIC supports the use of data-gathering technologies and sharing of data with consumers and industry.

*Question: How well do these proposed attributes present reasonable minimum requirements for systems implemented under the Real-Time System Management Information Program? Are any other minimum requirements necessary?*

85% accuracy and 90% availability seem lower than what is achievable. Clearly the traffic information in some regions is better than others, but even the better markets have insufficient system reliability to meet consumer expectations. Current real-time traffic data in heavily congested metro-areas generally does not meet the standards of reliability and coverage sought by consumers and the industry. U.S. DOT needs to strive for excellence and speed.

*Questions: What system is currently employed by the State department of transportation or other public agency to inventory highway conditions such as construction and maintenance activities, traffic incidents, traffic flow, or other real-time performance of the roadways? What types of information are recorded by the reporting system, i.e., what traffic or travel conditions are recorded? How is the reported information provided to the public? How broadly is the reported information shared with neighboring jurisdictions or other agencies? What data or communications standards are used by the reporting systems, either for recording information or for sharing information?*

The question is obviously geared toward State DOTs to get an overall assessment of how information is gathered and shared. As an industry-wide initiative, VTIC can play a vital role in helping achieve the goals of the program. The coalition members are committed to providing real-time traffic information, either through products used by government agencies to capture the data or by the traveling public. VTIC would like to be an active partner with the appropriate government agencies as real-time systems are built-out and enhanced and ensuring the data is shared with all interested parties. Industry can play a key role in getting the right information to the right people, quickly.

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