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Mapflow to take part in €41m motoring research project

08.08.2006 - Mapflow, the Dublin-based software house, has won a key role in a consortium working on a €41m Europe-wide technology research project into the future of motoring.

Called CVIS (co-operative vehicle-infrastructure systems), the major new EU-supported project is scheduled to last between three and four years.

It covers the design, development and testing of technologies to allow cars to communicate with each other and with the nearby roadside infrastructure over a wireless network. The project consortium involves 61 different organisations including car manufacturers, technology suppliers, mobile networks and local authorities in several countries.

Mapflow, which develops geographic information systems (GIS) and location-based services (LBS) technology, is a partner of Navteq, which is leading one of the work streams in the project consortium. Mapflow's role will be to develop technologies which use positioning and mapping components to provide spatial data for next-generation traffic management and information systems.

"The gap in the project that we fill is in being able to broker the location of vehicles and the location of roadside infrastructure," said Mapflow CEO Richard Bryce. "We're the glue in the middle."

Several applications will use the Mapflow technology, including dynamic information and guidance services for drivers, hazardous goods monitoring, emergency vehicle support and the provision of roadside sign information through in-car displays.

The principle of the system is that cars or trucks on the road have many sources of information such as roadside signs, parking areas, traffic sensors or toll points that drivers can use to determine the route they take or the speed at which they travel. Equally, information about the vehicle could also be relayed to the road infrastructure for more efficient traffic planning.

According to Bryce, one of the potential uses would be that when a heavy goods vehicle is on the road it might be possible to determine a pre-scheduled time to load or unload its freight so that it causes the minimum amount of disruption to traffic. The driver would need to receive route guidance to advise about the best way to travel. In addition, if the truck was carrying hazardous materials there might also be a need to monitor it from a safety perspective.

"If you could have the vehicle interface with the roadside infrastructure you could smooth the passage of the truck and the logistics associated with that," said Bryce.

A lot of data about traffic flows and road status is already available but until now this has resided on different systems, so that drivers or city planners haven't had access to the bigger picture, said Bryce. "Much of that information exists today but it's not managed on a co-ordinated basis, so the benefit [of this project] is that you can improve the quality of information that's delivered to the vehicles and the quality of information delivered to the roadside infrastructure."

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Another goal of the project will be to determine how this data should be presented to the driver, Bryce added. Various user interfaces such as in-car navigation systems will be tested to see which works best.

In revenue terms, the contract is worth under half a million euro to Mapflow but Bryce said that further revenue opportunities would result if the research is successful. "The nature of EU research projects is that you don't do them unless they're of strategic value to you," he told *siliconrepublic.com*.

By Gordon Smith

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