# Will floating car data help solve our global congestion challenge?

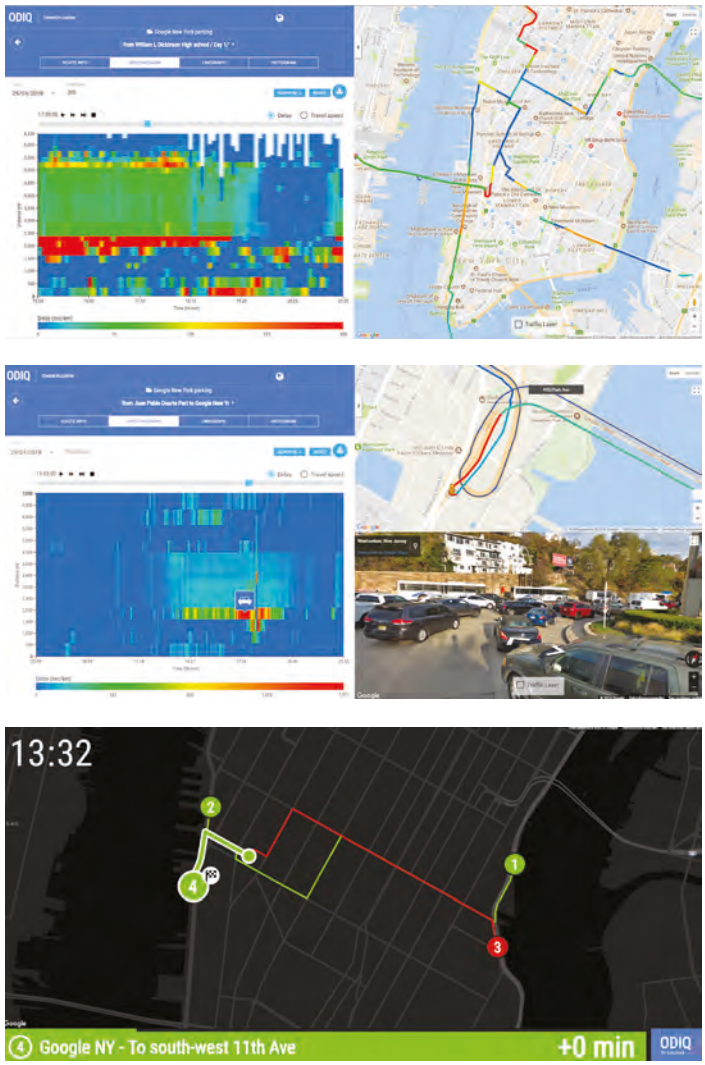
According to Karen Vancluysen, secretary general of Polis, "Air pollution, congestion and road safety are the top three priorities for our cities. Reliable data is a key resource to enable sound management in these three areas."

Over the past year, Localyse, a Belgium-based technology company, has been engaging with the ITS community by means of its traffic management tool Odiq. "The idea for Odiq came through our focus on mobility," says Chris Hoogwys, managing partner of Localyse. "As a Premier Google Cloud partner with a focus on Google Maps, we are interested in leveraging Google technology to help solve complex problems. Traffic congestion, reachability analysis and multimodal route planning are examples of the problems Localyse helps to solve."

## Need to know

**Benefits of using Odiq software for traffic management**

- Gives detailed real-time traffic information every 50m (164ft)
- Allows cities to visualize and interpret traffic flows based on Google Maps FCD
- Reduces the need for additional sensors to be installed
- Supports decisions to improve safety, reduce pollution and cut costs




Above: **The Odiq dashboard enables the use of Google Maps data for traffic management**

## Using Google Maps

Reducing congestion has a direct positive impact on air quality and road safety. "By engaging with traffic experts, we realized the potential of Google Maps' floating car data [FCD] and the benefits it could bring to the global ITS community. Odiq was born through combining traffic management expertise and Localyse's technical expertise," says Birgit Antonissen, Odiq product manager.

ERTICO – ITS Europe, with its vision of zero delays and fully informed people, advocates the added value that FCD brings to city planners, road authorities and road operators. FCD enables city planners to extend their existing investments to reduce congestion and improve journeys for drivers, saving them time, money and frustration. In particular road authorities save on the expense and time it takes to install and maintain additional road sensors.

Odiq improves accuracy and offers detailed real-time traffic information for every 50m (164ft) on every road type and class, resulting in the insight that transportation agencies and urban planners require to improve a city's road network performance.

## Mobility challenge

Belgium and the Netherlands are both densely populated countries with a tremendous mobility challenge. Reducing congestion is high on the agenda for both the government and the private sector. "Among the early adopters of Odiq are cities, including The Hague in the Netherlands and Namur in Belgium, institutions such as Traffic Service Nederland, construction companies such as BAM and mobility consultancies, among them Stratec. Every one of these organizations has a vested interest in improving traffic flows and reducing congestion," says Jeffrey Benning, country manager for Localyse in the Netherlands.

Jaime Huerta, secretary general of ITS Spain, sees Northern Europe taking the lead in using FCD. "The Benelux, the Nordics and the United Kingdom are leaders in Europe when it comes to understanding the value of floating car data, which helps users to comprehend traffic

flows and patterns and to anticipate congestion, whether spontaneous or structural in origin," he says. "In Spain, institutions such as Dirección General de Tráfico [DGT] and cities like Madrid and Barcelona are slowly but surely following in the footsteps of our Northern European counterparts."

### Accurate traffic data

Congestion is a truly global phenomenon and affects all of the world's major cities. Available for more than 110 countries and in 64 languages, Odiq can support traffic decision making in all continents. "Recently, Thierry Geerts, country director for Google Belgium, published his book *Digitalis*, in which he invites all of us to embrace technology to create a better future," says Annik Du Pont, advisor for international entrepreneurship at Flanders Investment and Trade. "I think Localyse did just that – by leveraging and adding value to existing Google Maps technology, it has created a powerful new tool [Odiq]. We look forward to supporting Localyse's international expansion based on its technological innovation."

Odiq is a cloud-based, Software as a Service (SaaS) solution. Traditionally, acquiring accurate traffic data has been heavily reliant on roadside infrastructure and human effort. Today, accurate traffic information is also available via an internet connection.





by **Larry Yermack**

# Is the private sector taking control of our entire transportation network?

Who is in charge of the transportation system? I know that this is kind of an odd question, but it got me thinking about the state of play of ITS today. Let me explain.

City street patterns emerged over a long period and many were designed, if you could use that word, for foot and animal traffic. Transportation technology entered the picture with automobiles and trains. Oh, and please don't take this as well-constructed history, but rather as an allegory to illustrate an important point. The introduction of automobiles and urban trains (subways, elevated lines and trolley cars) then helped to define the functional shape of the cities.

After an early attempt at privatization, subways were purchased by local government. The suburban highways and interstate highway system were designed by government. You could say that for most of the 20th century, the transportation network, for good or ill, was a project of government. Just as the Interstate Highway System helped to define the key work and leisure routes of suburban American life, so urban arterial grids helped create the city and the mass transit routes that defined living and working patterns.

We didn't have to like it and starting with Jane Jacobs [who campaigned against some insensitive urban renewal projects], the critics of road and highway building entered the public debate. For this discussion, where you stand on the issues is not important – the point is that the design of the transportation network was the product of a debate. There was the opportunity – through public hearings and votes on bond issues, not to mention elections – to affect the outcome. Local elections have been decided on transportation issues. One mayoral election in Houston revolved around buses versus trains for commuting. Buses won.

Fast-forward to today. We are no longer in the era of building new roads or transit, but, rather, in the age of system management to achieve maximum efficiency. With this shift, I fear, we have ceded control from the public to the private sector.

The levers of control today are real-time traffic and transit information, trip planning and payment. Of these the most effective is real-time information. The 511 helpline was created for government to provide these services, but governmental offerings have now been surpassed by private services. I spoke to the chief engineer of one very large and progressive state who suggested that governments should get out of the traffic information business completely and let private companies run it.


"The levers of control today are real-time traffic information, trip planning and payment"

Beyond information is trip planning, and we are seeing global corporations contemplating building out their capability to offer much more than individual rides. They are offering ridesharing services and can address first and last mile challenges, but have yet to incorporate all the other paid transportation services. If and when they do, they will be the managers of the transportation network. Is this good or bad? I don't know, but I'd sure like to see a public debate on it.

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