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Traffic.com or Traffic.con?

USDOT's administration of traffic data collection efforts under the Transportation Technology Innovation and Demonstration (TTID) program is the subject of increasingly harsh criticism in Washington. Sunlight Foundation, a Capitol Hill watchdog group has brought to light previously confidential agreements between the USDOT and a collection of metro areas which reveal systematic irregularities.

In most of the agreements USDOT went along with a waiver of the normal requirement of a 20% local agency contribution, making them giveaways that seem to have been for the benefit of its sole source provider Traffic.com. USDOT's own "ITS Lessons Learned" analysis says that earmarked ITS projects like the TTID program require that state and local agencies contribute their own funds in order to access those federal funds.

- USDOT's professed intention that traffic data under TTID be used to provide advanced traveler information to the public is being crippled by contract restrictions that limit the most useful local data collected under the programs to internal agency use. This prevents local metro authorities or state DOTs from providing feeds to variable message signs or 511 telephone services.
- Traffic.com is being allowed to dictate the financial terms under which it provides USDOT financed data to its own competitors like Westwood One and Clear Channel.

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Robot cars face the future

The recent DARPA Urban Challenge showed that robotic vehicles are advancing rapidly. Tartan Racing won the challenge, with its Chevy Tahoe, Boss. Part of the winning team was **Raj Rajkumar**, professor of electrical and computer engineering at the General Motors Laboratory at Carnegie Mellon University. He explains the basis of the team's success and maps out how autonomous vehicles are likely to affect our lives in future.

[Click here to listen to the interview](#)

- Provisions touted publicly as revenue sharing are bogus, most of the agreements show, and allow all funds to be circulated back into the for-profit business of a USDOT established monopoly.
- All of the new traffic sensor equipment and system software deployed in this taxpayer-subsidized program becomes the sole property of Traffic.com.

Leading congressmen have asked the department's Inspector General to open an investigation into irregularities in the administration of the TTID program. Senator Orrin Hatch (Republican Utah) has been told that the internal inspectors have been assigned and that a comprehensive audit of the program is underway.

In the light of this audit, efforts to recruit new metro areas to the traffic data program are stalling out, and some are pointedly snubbing offers of US funds under TTID. In the New York area the Port Authority which controls the six major New York New Jersey crossings recently announced its own traveler information service free of the taint of federal funds.

It is now apparent the TTID program has been the source of difficulty within USDOT since its beginning in the late 1990s. It has its origins in political deals and has been shaped by intense lobbying and extraordinary congressional manoeuvres by several congressmen.

USDOT's handling of this matter has varied. In February 2001 the Federal Highway department resisted pressure from then chairman of the House transportation committee Bud Shuster to direct a major expansion of the TTID funding to Traffic.com without competitive bids. They said in a letter, which has since surfaced that the program "would significantly change the scope of the (Traffic.com) contract and require re-competition."

Defense appropriations?

To prevent the USDOT's planned re-competition, Traffic.com's supporters in the Congress managed to insert language in the FY2002 defense appropriations bill that authorized USDOT to award the new contract to it instead of competing it. The program has nothing to with defense but it was sufficient legal basis for the then US Secretary of Transportation, Norman Mineta to order the expanded TTIP program be granted to Traffic.com without competition.

Three years later opponents of the monopoly managed to insert wording in the big 2005 SAFETEA-LU funding legislation opening the program up to competition. However the new House transportation committee chairman Rep. Don Young managed to counter this with a statement of legislative intent in the congressional record saying that all the new money should go to the "existing contract."

USDOT was being pulled in two separate directions between supporters of

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Genesis of the 'speed kills' paradigm

Widely accepted it may be, but the statement 'speed kills' holds little basis in fact. Traffic safety specialist **AI Gullon** traces the source of a claim that informs a high proportion of investment in traffic technology. [more...](#)

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S&P 500	↑ 1469.72

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competition and supporters of monopoly. But it went with the monopolists, a choice that it may now be regretting.

*Jerry Werner has consulted and written on ITS matters since 1991 and was editorial director of the National Transportation Operations Coalition from 1998 to 2005. He has followed this case closely and more information about it is **here***

*Peter Samuel is a Washington DC-based area reporter who followed ITS in its early years and now specializes in tollroad issues – see **TOLLROADSnews***



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