BUILDING THE VISION

A Series of AZTech ITS Model Deployment Success Stories for the Phoenix Metropolitan Area

NUMBER ELEVEN

Information Connection
Creating a State-of-the-Art Privatized Traveler Information System

The Challenge:

As an international showcase for intelligent transportation, AZTech has a mission of creating a regional intermodal transportation system through public and private partnerships. In working toward this lofty goal, AZTech's most valuable commodity has been information.

Intelligent transportation is about more than just technology. It's also about giving travelers the information they need to make informed decisions about their travel plans. Traditionally, the availability and accuracy of traveler information has been severely limited. While periodic traffic reports have long been a staple of the electronic media, these reports tend to be both brief and general. For most travelers, obtaining information about their planned route has been a long shot at best. To reach more motorists and transit riders, the range of information and the network of distribution would require significant expansions.

Giving travelers more information only addresses half of the problem. The information that is distributed must have value to travelers. To have real value, information must be timely, accurate, accessible and specific to each traveler's needs.

To improve both the quantity and quality of traveler information, AZTech needed to develop a new system of collecting and distributing comprehensive information quickly and efficiently. This system would have to make it convenient for any traveler to access specific information on demand. And in keeping with AZTech's commitment to cost-efficient solutions, it would have to make good fiscal sense.

The Solution:

Through the power of partnerships, AZTech successfully built one of the world's most extensive networks of traveler information. Wide-ranging partnerships were fostered between government and the private sector. By allowing both sectors to do what they do best, AZTech was able to develop one of the world's first privatized Advanced Traveler Information Systems.

"The Advanced Traveler Information System is one of AZTech's main components and the heart of what we're trying to do," said Dan Powell, AZTech chief administrator. An abundance of timely, accurate traffic information is generated through AZTech's fiber-optic telecommunications network that links 13 operations centers across the Valley of the Sun. In addition to being an invaluable tool in effective traffic management, this information also has great value to motorists and transit riders. The key has been developing effective methods of distributing this information to the public. This is where AZTech's private partners enter the picture.

A vast web of information resources has been developed through the involvement of private companies working as part of the AZTech initiative. AZTech private partners Ecotek, ETAK, Fastline and Metro

Networks play important roles in the Advanced Traveler Information System by working cooperatively to disseminate the data provided by AZTech's public partners. Extracting pertinent traffic information, merging it into a common format and communicating it to various end-user products requires a team effort by the private partners. Privatization allows the information to be distributed in various customized formats, with private partners offering a variety of products and services for receiving a wide range of up-to-the-minute traffic data.

Many of these information sources are easily accessible by the public at no charge. Touch Arizona kiosks provide traffic updates and tourist information at malls, business centers and other locations. The Public Remote Access System, an interactive voice-response system, offers traveler information via a toll-free telephone call to 1-888-411-ROAD. And by taking advantage of the substantial amount of timely, accurate traveler information provided by AZTech, traditional sources such as commercial television and radio are able to generate traffic reports of a higher quality.

Some sources require special access. The Arizona Department of Transportation's home page on the Internet at *http://www.azfms.com/* offers live traffic video, maps of freeway incidents and road closures, bus schedules and weather reports. ETAK also offers traveler information on their Internet home page at *http://www.etaktraffic.com/phoenix*. And a TrafficCheck cable television channel in the Tempe area broadcasts traffic information during morning and evening commute times.

Additional premium services are available for a nominal subscription fee. Personalized traffic reports are transmitted via pager, palm-top computer, email, fax or digital cell phone. Through this system, subscribers provide their traveler profile, including the times of day and routes of their commute. Personalized messages are then dispatched to the chosen device to warn the driver of traffic incidents or congestion along their route. Subscribers can request information on any route at any time.

"A lot of the systems we're using - telephones, cell phones, personal computers, the Internet, pagers - are things that have a large installed base, so people don't necessarily have to buy anything new," said Larry Sweeney, vice president and general manager of ETAK's advanced development center. "It may be a system they already have, so they just have to buy a new software package or a receiver, or subscribe to a service."

In-vehicle navigation systems are expected to be ready by early 1999. The hardware for these systems is designed to fit in a vehicle's radio aperture and will be sold at various retail stores. A nominal subscription fee will also be required for this service, which will transmit real-time traffic information by FM subcarrier. This information will be displayed as text on the front of the navigation unit and broadcast through synthesized speech.

"We developed a working business model for a privatized, self-sustaining, multi-modal, Advanced Traveler Information System," said Pierre Pretorius, AZTech program manager. "It's really quite comprehensive."

The Benefits:

AZTech's Advanced Traveler Information System sets the standard for private/public partnerships. The public sector provides the infrastructure for obtaining practical traffic information, while the private sector develops and markets many of the devices and services used to distribute the information to the public.

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Through this arrangement, the value of traffic information has increased dramatically. Travelers now have much greater access to information that is more timely, more accurate and more comprehensive. This promotes proactive traffic management by alerting motorists to potential obstacles and helping them divert around problem areas.

"The private sector partners add value to the traveler information," said Pretorius. "And they make a business out of the system so it can be self-sustaining on a long-term basis."

Privatization also reduces the cost to the taxpayers, as the private partners assume the costs of researching, developing and marketing the communications devices and services. And long-term plans call for AZTech to share a percentage of profits after the market for the new devices matures. The growth potential for the system is significant. For its next phase, AZTech has already received 19 proposals from 32 companies that would like to join the team of private partners involved in developing its trend-setting traveler information system.

As an international showcase for state-of-the-art Intelligent Transportation Systems, the AZTech Model Deployment Initiative has documented numerous success stories. To learn more, visit the AZTech home page on the Internet at *http:www.azfms.com*.