

## Intelligent Transportation Systems Help Local Governments Do Their Job Better

The phrase “Intelligent Transportation Systems” (ITS) typically brings to mind conventional transportation applications, such as freeway and transit management, freight movement, and toll collection. Because local governments usually do not have a role in those applications, it is not surprising that they have shown little interest in ITS technologies to date. But now’s the time to take a look at ITS in a broader perspective—namely, the application of information technology to address a range of local government concerns, such as public safety, mobility, and quality of life. ITS technologies can, in fact, help local governments do their job better.

Transportation budgets generally account for only a fraction (about 5 percent) of local government spending. But if you dig deeper into the functional areas that compose most local government spending, you’ll find that transportation plays a large role in many of those areas. And the information technologies inherent in ITS can be used to improve the delivery of those services. For example:

- Nearly half of local tax dollars are spent on education. Most localities manage and operate a bus fleet to shuttle students to school. ITS



ITS technologies can be used to improve bus scheduling and operations and to track bus movements.

technologies can be used to improve fleet scheduling and management, to track bus movements in real time, and maintain the fleet. Not only would this make operations more efficient, but it could also help police and rescue units locate a bus in the event of an emergency. They can also assist with security on the buses.

- Cities and counties spend about one-fourth of their budgets on public safety. By implementing communication technologies that adhere to the National ITS Architecture (see ITS Sheet 2), precious minutes or seconds can be shaved off the time it takes police and rescue units to reach a crash site or other emergency situation, and communication and cooperation between neighboring jurisdictions can be improved.
- Social services, which can easily account for more than half of a county’s budget, often provide transportation to and from work sites, day-care facilities, medical appointments, and so forth. Counties and cities can use ITS technologies to match users with transportation service options and to provide an automated means of tracking usage and allocating funds.
- Public works departments serve a range of functional areas, including street maintenance, sewer operations, and trash collection. By helping public works departments schedule, deploy, and track work crews and vehicles, ITS technologies can improve operations and fleet management and make management better able to shift priorities to meet residents’ needs.
- Many jurisdictions require residents to register their vehicles annually with the city and/or the county. Evidence of that registration is typically in the form of a sticker affixed to the windshield. ITS technologies could be used to automatically update the sticker (which would instead be a transponder) and allow police and others to verify its authenticity from a distance.

The benefits of ITS are usually thought to be limited to traffic operations. Yet integrated technologies such as ITS provide benefits to many areas of local government.

Benefits  Local Government Focus Areas	Traditional Perspective									Expanded Perspective						
	Traffic Signal Control	Freeway Management	Transit Management	Incident Management	Electronic Toll Collection	Emergency Management Services	Electronic Fare Payments	Railroad Grade Crossings	Traveler Information	Cost-Effective Services	Fleet Management	Environmental Quality	Sustainable Communities	Safety	Traffic Flow/Congestion Relief	Revenue Collection
Economic Development										✓					✓	
Planning										✓		✓	✓		✓	
Service/Utilities										✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Schools/Education										✓	✓			✓	✓	
Public Safety	✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
Transportation/Traffic	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Public Works/Environment										✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

- Traffic cases can consume a large portion of a municipal court’s docket. By improving vehicle identification methods and accident record-keeping systems, ITS technologies could help expedite the resolution of traffic cases.

ITS is changing the way we think about transportation issues. No longer is transportation an isolated component of local government operations; rather, transportation reaches across almost all areas of local government operations (see chart). Cities and counties can reap significant

benefits from ITS technologies by sharing information that can be used to better manage the transportation system and improve communications with the public.

Most ITS technologies are also applicable across agency boundaries. In an era when agencies are being downsized and governments are striving to improve productivity and efficiency, these technologies hold the promise of more efficient interdepartmental operations and enhanced services to the public.

**For more information...**

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Federal Transit Administration, Office of Mobility Innovation; 202-366-4991; fax: 202-366-3765.



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Publication No. FHWA-OP-00-030