Houston TranStar wins National Award for
Innovation in Providing Travel Time Information
Center for Digital Government recognizes collaboration for travel updates

Houston TranStar has received the "2011 Digital Government Achievement Award" from the Center for Digital Government (government-to-government category). The award is for TranStar's cutting-edge Anonymous Wireless Address Matching travel time information system. The new deployment, extending north more than 200 miles along the I-45 North corridor to Dallas, gives Houston TranStar the capability to monitor and manage traffic conditions on this major evacuation route.

"Houston TranStar's monitoring system on I-45 between Houston and Dallas allows us to provide travel information during both evacuations and for day-to-day use at a fraction of the cost of other technologies," said John R. Whaley, Director of Houston TranStar. "Because of the incredible cost savings involved, this technology is a game-changer in travel monitoring--whether for emergency management or daily commuting."

The plan to monitor travel conditions on I-45 came after Hurricane Rita threatened to devastate Southeast Texas in 2005. When millions of Gulf Coast residents evacuated their homes and created a 30-mile traffic jam from downtown Houston along I-45 North, officials recognized the need for a more extensive traffic monitoring system.

The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) (one of Houston TranStar's four member agencies) and the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) began to investigate more cost-effective solutions to capture real-time travel times and traffic speed data. TTI, a state agency within the Texas A&M University System, found that *Bluetooth*-enabled devices could be used to determine accurate travel times, and could do so in a cost-effective, non-intrusive way that protects privacy and is easy to install and maintain.

"The *Bluetooth*-based Anonymous Wireless Address Matching system, or AWAM, can typically be deployed at less than 10% of the cost of traditional toll-tag based travel monitoring systems," said Stuart Corder, Director of Transportation Operations, TxDOT's Houston District. "The AWAM system saved taxpayers $1.5 Million and let us accelerate implementation of new technology on a major Interstate."

Travel time information is not only available during evacuations, but is accessible 24 hours a day/7 days a week to provide current travel conditions on IH 45 between Houston and Dallas. The sensors collect anonymous data that cannot be used to gather personal information: All data are encrypted upon receipt before being processed. Travel times obtained from the AWAM system can be viewed on Houston TranStar's website at www.houstontranstar.org. More information about the system and protection of travelers' privacy can be found at http://traffic.houstontranstar.org/bluetooth/transtar_bluetooth.html.

The Center for Digital Government is a national research and advisory institute on information technology policies and best practices in state and local government. Houston TranStar was recognized by the Center at the state level in 2006. This is Houston TranStar's first national-level award from the Center.

Houston TranStar is a consortium of four government agencies that coordinate and enhance transportation and emergency management services in Southeast Texas. The agencies include Harris County, Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County (METRO), City of Houston the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT). Check us out on the Houston TranStar Facebook and Twitter pages.

-30-