



Part 2: Watching From... Everywhere

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KYW Regional Affairs Council

“Beware! Traffic Robo-Cops!”

By Ian Bush

PHILADELPHIA (CBS) — EZ Pass lets you breeze through tolls, but that transponder is doing more than saving you time on your drive. It’s one of a number of technologies used for traffic management that — for some — stoke privacy concerns.

To help you avoid delays on your route, and to hasten the arrival of road crews and emergency personnel at a crash scene, the agencies responsible for the roads in Pennsylvania and New Jersey have all sorts of tech at their disposal.

“Closed circuit television cameras, dynamic message signs, we also have what we call our TMS sensors, which are microwave sensors that we use for incident detection,” says Lou Belmonte (right), a traffic engineer with PennDOT’s District 6-0.

“The EZ Pass tag readers are really, right now, among the best technologies to actually measure travel time,” he tells *KYW Newsradio*.

The tag readers are those beige panels mounted over roads such as I-476.

Belmonte says the high penetration rate of EZ Pass in the Philadelphia region can provide true travel time for display on those message boards.

But with an EZ Pass transponder connected to our name, vehicle, and financial account information, what do authorities get to know about our movements?

“It’s unique in that they can tell when a specific transponder goes from point A to point B, but it doesn’t then connect the EZ Pass account with personally identifiable information,” notes Tom

Feeney, a spokesman for the New Jersey Turnpike Authority, which, like Penndot, scrambles your EZ Pass tag number so — the agencies say — you're not being tracked.

And, Feeney says, there's no talk of ticketing drivers for speed violations based on those travel time readers, or even with the time stamps on your EZ Pass transactions at the toll plazas.

Feeney says the Turnpike Authority gets requests three to five times a week for EZ Pass information in civil matters, such as accident or divorce cases, and those requests are denied.

“Everything I hear about the use of that technology for monitoring traffic flow is very sensitive to the privacy issues,” he says.

Nevertheless, an EZ Pass statement sent to a customer via mail or e-mail can make it simple for a divorce lawyer to build a solid case for a client.

“He claimed to be at his office in Philadelphia, and EZ Pass records showed he was in New Jersey — and that's where the girlfriend is,” recalls family law attorney Lynne Gold-Bikin (right), a partner at [Weber Gallagher](#) in Norristown, Pa.

She notes that although EZ Pass and government agencies aren't open to subpoenas for travel records, a party in a divorce case is obligated to produce them if subpoenaed.

“There used to be privacy. That's not a word that's in the vocabulary anymore,” Gold-Bikin says.

So, if you're not happy in your marriage, she says, tell your partner that you're not happy — and move out.

[Kapsch](#), the company that provides EZ Pass services here and in at least a dozen other states, has filed a patent that would put a camera in your transponder. The thought is that vehicles could be charged a toll based on the number of occupants, and authorities could check for violations in high-occupancy vehicle lanes.

A Kapsch spokesman says the patent “protects our unique ideas; it does not signify a commercial product.”

Even if you eschew EZ Pass, your cell phone might be giving up details about your drive. Penndot, NJ DOT, and private traffic services have been testing or are using travel-time readers that grab your cell phone's unique Bluetooth ID (the MAC address).

[Traffax](#), one of the companies that provides traffic monitoring services, says MAC addresses “are not linked to a specific person” and that “users concerned with privacy can set options in

their device (referred to as 'discovery mode' or 'visibility') so that the device will not be detectable."

Still, advises Gold-Bikin, the divorce lawyer: "If you're going to cheat, leave your phone home. And don't take a car — take a cab."