Advanced Technology Approach to Assessing Road User Charges: Research Progress

- David J. Forkenbrock
- Director, Public Policy Center
- University of Iowa
Overview of presentation

- Principles of user-based financing
- Current ITS applications to collect tolls
- Public policy issues
- New GPS technologies for assessing road user charges
User-based financing: Four bases for pricing public-use facilities

- Generate revenue
- Cover costs of providing service
- Influence behavior to induce greater or less use
- Achieve equity or other social objectives
Problems with current methods

- Toll roads lose 15 to 20 percent
- Delays at toll booths are onerous
- Fuel tax evasion may be 15 percent
- Alternative fuels portend a poor future for fuel taxes
Characteristics of ideal system of user charges

- Low collection cost
- Stable revenue stream
- Users occasioning greater costs pay more
- Low evasion rate
- Incentive to use appropriate roads
- Unaffected by type of propulsion
Two fundamental ITS approaches to collecting road use charges

- Smart roads with dumb vehicles
- Smart vehicles with dumb roads
Technology behind the smart vehicle approach to collecting user charges

- Global positioning system (GPS)
- 24 satellites that beam signals
  - Satellites beam signals but do not receive them
  - There is no charge for using the signals
Funding partners for this research

• FHWA
• California
• Connecticut
• Iowa
• Kansas
• Michigan
• Minnesota
• Missouri

• North Carolina
• Ohio
• Oregon
• South Carolina
• Texas
• Utah
• Washington
• Wisconsin
**Key components of on-board system**

- GPS provides real-time location information to vehicle
- GIS road data file
- On-board computer compares GPS and GIS to record road use
New approach to charging road users

- Global Positioning System
- Vehicle GIS Computer Software
- Vehicle On-board Computer Database
- Road Use Summary
- Data Processing Center
- Vehicle On-board Weight Indicator
Advantages of the new approach

- Road-specific user charges that are commensurate with damage
- Ability to charge congestion fees
- Improved transportation planning
- Can keep system as simple as a state wishes
Public policy advantages

- Ability to charge on the basis of actual miles traveled
- Incentives to avoid congested roads
- Incentives to operate heavy vehicles on appropriate roads
Need for on-board weight indicators

- Current weigh-in-motion (WIM) scales are feasible only on major highways
- Vehicle weight is a big factor in road damage
- Actual vehicle weight, not registered weight, is appropriate
- Should reweigh with every cargo change
GPS-based financing is good policy

- Stable revenue stream
- Vehicles that create higher costs pay more
- Possible incentive to use appropriate roads
- Type of vehicle power unimportant
- Privacy is maintained
Major benefits to road users

- Expedited permitting for interstate truckers
- Low-cost on-board navigation systems
- Automatic emergency-location identification
- Lower registration fees
- Mileage-based insurance is possible
- Private, high-performance tollways become feasible
Issues to resolve

• GPS accuracy, especially near tall buildings
• Transition from old to new approach
• Encryption of data for privacy
• Operation of billing center and method of billing/payment
• Rental autos and NAFTA trucks
Implementation—addressing privacy concerns

- Data polygons could be used to measure miles driven in each state
- No data on specific trips would be stored
- Would allow fair apportionment of user revenue to the states