

## **TRAFFIC CONGESTION EARLY WARNING**

By William Nicoson

Is there new hope for the exasperated commuter?

The investment of time required to drive to D.C. in early morning or evening has always been a crap shoot. I choose one of three possible routes based on prior congestive experience at the time of departure and hope for the best. That means I allow at least an extra 15 minutes for bumper-to-bumper tie-ups and slow-downs in order to arrive at the outset of a meeting or before the curtain rises.

EyeCast.com, a Herndon company specializing in internet-based technologies, has put in place an early warning system for traffic congestion, with the collaboration of the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT). Some 110 cameras have been installed by VDOT at key highway locations throughout Northern Virginia to hasten dispatch of assistance to sites of accidents or breakdowns and to permit overhead posting of adverse driving conditions. EyeCast.com has established a website ([www.highwaynet.com](http://www.highwaynet.com)) to display at all times the current photographic images of VDOT cameras, permitting drivers in advance to evaluate conditions for themselves. Photos from 25 cameras are now available. By summer of this year, the website will post images from all 110 VDOT cameras.

For a fee (\$2 per month), subscribers to a service called MyHighwayNet may personalize available information by programming up to three commuting routes and up to five cameras per route (if available). Subscribers will also receive images that refresh up to one frame per second depending on the speed of the user's modem. That's 60 times faster than images available to the non-subscribing public. The low fee is made possible by expected advertising at the site.

Current internet camera coverage of commuting routes to D.C. from Herndon-Reston is limited to the beltway and I-66. Camera coverage of the Dulles Toll Road at Hunter Mill Road is promised by summer of this year, but no cameras have been installed or are currently planned for Route 123 or the Washington Memorial Parkway, major alternative routes for D.C. commuters.

So this summer when I visit MyHighwayNet, I'll be able to check only a single D.C. commuting route. If I find congestion, I'll head for an alternative route which may prove to be even worse. In fact congestion on the Toll Road itself may be overlooked by a camera at Hunter Mill Road which won't record long toll-booth lines or tie-ups at the exit to Route 7. And if you commute to Fairfax City, George Mason University, Fair Oaks, Fair Lakes or the County's Government Center, forget it: there won't be a single VDOT camera on the Fairfax County Parkway or West Ox Road to offer early warning of slow-going.

But Joan Morris, VDOT's Public Affairs Director, assures me that VDOT will respond to its constituents' requests for expanded camera coverage, and J.C. Amini, Senior Vice President of

EyeCast.com, assures me this is “a dynamic project.” I believe them. Conceptually, it’s a great project. I just hope that early neglect of critical commuting routes won’t discourage the harried consumer before the photo holes are filled and the early-warning information highway is paved by more than the best intentions.

*William Nicoson is a former publisher of Connection Newspapers.*