

# Carnegie Mellon spinoff receives funding to commercialize transit app

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Tiramisu Transit LLC, a Carnegie Mellon University spinoff, has received Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) Phase I funding from the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) to commercialize Tiramisu, the smartphone application that enables transit riders to create real-time information about bus schedules and seating.

The \$102,000 award, through the USDOT's Federal Transit Administration and its Research and Innovative Technology Administration, will be used to identify sustainable business models for crowd-sourced transit [information systems](#).

Tiramisu has been in use in Pittsburgh since the summer of 2011 and is available for [iPhone](#) and [Android](#) phones. Thus far, users have recorded more than 30,000 trips on Port Authority of Allegheny County buses and trains.

Tiramisu — literally, Italian for "pick me up" — was developed by researchers in the Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Accessible Public Transportation (RERC-APT), supported in part by CMU's Traffic21 initiative. It currently works only for the Port Authority and CMU systems, but the software architecture is designed so that it can be deployed to other transit systems. The team will be adding another region soon.

Even before a user boards a vehicle, Tiramisu displays the nearest stops and a list of buses or light rail vehicles that are scheduled to arrive. The

list includes arrival times, based either on real-time reports from current riders, from historic data, or from the [transit](#) service schedule. Once aboard, the user indicates whether many, few or no seats are available and then presses a button, causing the phone to share its ongoing GPS trace with the Tiramisu server. Tiramisu also can be used to report problems, positive experiences and suggestions.

The Tiramisu team is led by Aaron Steinfeld, co-director of RERC-APT and senior systems scientist in the Robotics Institute; Anthony Tomasic, senior systems scientist in the Institute for Software Research; and John Zimmerman, associate professor in the Human-Computer Interaction Institute and the School of Design.

Tiramisu is a project within the RERC-APT, a federally funded collaboration between Carnegie Mellon and the University of Buffalo, State University of New York focused on the transportation needs of people with disabilities and is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education through the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research. In addition, the project has received support from Carnegie Mellon's Traffic21 initiative, IBM, Google and the SIN AIS project, a joint research project between Carnegie Mellon and the University of Madeira on increasing sustainability.

Tiramisu is among the initial projects to reach deployment and commercialization with help from the Traffic21 initiative, which was created by Carnegie Mellon with support from the Hillman Foundation. It draws on expertise and resources from across the campus to stimulate a broad community partnership to identify, refine and deploy "intelligent transportation system" technology advancements to the Pittsburgh region's transportation system. The goal is for the region to become internationally recognized as the place for "smart transportation," thus attracting further investment in both research and commercialization.

CMU's culture of entrepreneurship is supported by six campus incubator groups, collectively known as Greenlighting Startups. An engine for accelerating innovation and job creation, Greenlighting Startups builds upon the university's impressive record of turning campus innovations into new businesses by supporting award-winning professors and world-class students in transforming their research into thriving commercial enterprises.

Provided by Carnegie Mellon University

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