Alert system avoids commuter chaos

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Imagine never being trapped in peak hour traffic again. Commuters, your frustrations are over. QUT transport experts have designed an alert service that warns you when your travel route is congested or your public transport service is delayed.

It's the commuter version of severe weather alert texts.

But instead of broadcasting blanket warnings to everyone, this system sends you targeted emails based on the preferences you set.

"If you take the Shorncliffe rail line to and from work, delays on the Ferny Grove line aren't relevant to you," said Dr Marc Miska from the Smart Transport Research Centre, hosted by QUT's Faculty of Science and Engineering.

"But if you're madly trying to wrap up your work and meet the 5.16pm Shorncliffe train so you're home in time to bath the kids, an email at 4.45pm warning of a 15-minute delay to that service is invaluable.

"For other transport update services like the @qpsmedia Twitter feeds and the Translink website, the onus is on you to constantly check for [information](#) relating to your commute.

"The beauty of the Commuter Info Service is that it contacts you - and only if there's information relevant to you."

Dr Miska said, when registering on the [Community Info Service website](#),

commuters are prompted to log how they travel to and from work each day, and at what times.

Should a disruption affect those roads or public transport services during the periods they have specified, they are notified by email and offered suggestions on alternative routes.

The Commuter Info Service gathers its transport intelligence by mining the Queensland Government's open data sources and other government feeds for information on planned road works, congestion warnings, transport disruptions, incident notifications, weather warnings and emergency services updates.

Transport and Main Roads Minister Scott Emerson welcomed the service's innovative use of government data.

"This service is a great example of how information released by the Queensland Government's open data strategy can be used to benefit the community," Mr Emerson said.

"From the vast amount of data publically available, the Smart Transport Research Centre has found a way to tailor this information for the individual commuter.

"It's a great idea and it shows what practical solutions can be achieved with innovative uses of data."

The Commuter Info Service also scans crowd-sourced transport information such as the @SEQIncidents Twitter feed and the twittersphere.

"While official communication channels are accurate, they're usually slower to publicise problems than the tweeters who are waiting at that

crowded bus stop or train platform," Dr Miska said.

"By scanning the full gamut of information as it's published, we can identify a problem, verify it with official information sources and notify affected commuters faster than other services can manage at present.

"Rushing to meet a transport service that is delayed anyway is perhaps the biggest frustration commuters face - if we can eliminate that frustration we can entice more people to choose public transport options."

The Commuter Info Service currently covers road networks and public transport services in the Gold Coast, Brisbane and Sunshine Coast areas, and could expand to other cities in the coming months.

Commuters can register at www.seqcommuter.info.

The Smart Transport Research Centre is developing a Commuter Info Service app that will send alerts to commuters' smartphones.

The app is expected to be live within three months.

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

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