

German automakers want real-time car data for maps app

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Audi, BMW and Daimler want to turn their cars into real-time sensors that will provide data to the HERE map service they recently purchased from Nokia, the German automakers said Monday.

The aim is to speed up the development of more powerful maps needed for automated driving and other applications, but also to fend off the threat from smartphone-based rivals such as Google and Apple.

"We want HERE to become the world's best reality index," said Rupert Stadler, the chief executive of Audi. "This index knows what happens where, in the very moment. It is a live representation of the world."

Data collected by cars won't be limited to traffic information. Windscreen wiper use, for example, will also be transmitted to indicate weather conditions.

In a nod to consumers' privacy concerns, all information will be anonymized. "The cars will send data about the current driving situation but not about the driver," said BMW's chief technology officer, Klaus Froehlich. It will be supplemented with data provided from smartphones, wearable devices and even traffic lights, he added.

The automakers will each hold a 1/3rd stake in the company, but the aim is to take a hands-off approach to ownership. The companies will encourage other car manufacturers to cooperate with the service by also providing data, a move that would pit the auto industry against Google

and Apple, whose smartphone apps are increasingly used by drivers.

HERE president Sean Fernback said the backing of three major automakers, who jointly paid 2.5 billion euros (\$2.7 billion) for the company, would allow it to develop a new generation of high-definition maps and fill out the white spaces in its service—notably China.

"We have a healthy financial position so we are able to afford the substantial sums required to succeed in building what we envisage," he said.

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