

Microsoft's Allen, Transportation Department offer \$50 million in 'Smart City' contest

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Microsoft billionaire Paul Allen is teaming with the U.S. Department of Transportation to offer a \$50 million prize to the winner of a "Smart City" competition aimed at promoting high-tech solutions to traffic snarls.

The competition is opened to mid-sized cities.

"Our national vision for transportation is still very much constrained by 20th century thinking about technology and the integration of technology," Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx said in a briefing Monday. "We want to increase our ability to rapidly absorb new technology ... so we can do things previous generations only imagined as science fiction."

Among the options on the table are autonomous vehicles that reduce the number of collisions, cars that communicate with each other and wired infrastructure that can keep traffic flowing.

Policy solutions, like land use management, are also likely to be part of any package, Foxx said.

The prize will go to the city that develops "the most innovative, forward-thinking plan to harness technology and re-imagine how people move."

The federal DOT will put up \$40 million. Allen's Vulcan Inc. will contribute \$10 million.

The Seattle philanthropist got involved because he was looking for ways to reduce the 25 percent of [greenhouse gas emissions](#) attributed to the transportation system, said Vulcan president and chief operating officer Barbara Bennett, who joined Foxx in the briefing.

"We thought: Wouldn't it be great to do something with a city?" she said.

Projects that improve urban mass transit could help scale back emissions, while also creating safer, healthier communities.

"This is the sort of project that we like - partnering with others to develop innovative, scalable proof-of-concept solutions that address some of the world's most urgent challenges," Bennett added.

Foxx acknowledged that \$50 million isn't a lot of money when it comes to rethinking transportation systems. On Friday, President Barack Obama signed a five-year, \$305 billion highway infrastructure bill.

But Foxx said the competition will spur cities to think creatively and could draw in other partners, including private companies.

"We believe this competition will punch well above its weight," he said.

Cities with 2010 Census populations between 200,000 and 850,000 can enter the contest. Applications are due Feb. 4. Five finalists will be picked in March, with the winner named in June.

More information is available at: www.transportation.gov/smartcity/nofo

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