

# Traffic signals in Frisco will soon talk with cars as part of a new technology push

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Credit: Scott Meltzer/public domain

What if you knew when you stopped at a traffic signal whether you had two minutes or 10 seconds before the light turned green?

That basic information has been shown to provide an extra level of comfort for drivers. And it's part of a [new technology](#) coming soon to a [vehicle](#) near you.

Frisco is expected to be the second [city](#) in the country to connect its traffic signal network with certain vehicles. Las Vegas linked its network of intersections with the technology back in December. Frisco's network of 115 traffic signals is planned to go live in May.

"This is the wave of the future," said Frisco Mayor Maher Maso, who has already taken a test drive with the new tool. "It becomes second nature."

It's also the first step in connecting a vehicle to its surroundings as the automotive industry moves toward self-driving cars.

"A lot of people think autonomous vehicles are all about the car," Maso said. "The reality is it's autonomous transportation systems and traffic systems. Everything needs to communicate."

Audi is the only automaker offering this traffic signal information technology to vehicles so far. And it's available only on select 2017 Audi A4, Q7 and A4 allroad models that have an Audi connect PRIME subscription. Other manufacturers are expected to integrate the technology into their own vehicles as the service expands to more cities.

"It's simply getting information into the hands of drivers to make decisions," said Brian Moen, assistant director of engineering services for the city of Frisco.

The first feature, called time to green, provides a display on Audi's instrument panel that counts down the seconds until the red light turns green.

Other functions are being tested. Drivers could get more guidance on starting and stopping. Alternate routes could be calculated based on real-time traffic data. Or vehicle speeds could be suggested to maximize the number of green lights.

Beyond easing some driver frustration, the technology aims to improve traffic flow and create fuel efficiencies.

Last fall, the Frisco City Council approved an agreement with Oregon-based Traffic Technology Services Inc. to launch the service in the suburb at no cost to the city.

"These are some of the very first connected vehicle applications that are being implemented," said Kiel Ova, chief marketing officer for Traffic Technology Services.

The city sends its traffic signal information to Traffic Technology Services, which then makes it available in real time on a secure network to partners in the automotive industry. The industry then relays the data to individual vehicles.

"We provide a data product second by second for every signalized intersection where we have a connection, and we do that regardless of whether a car shows up at that intersection or not," Ova said.

Much of what's happening with smart vehicles has been concentrated in private industry or at the university research level. Sharing traffic signal data is one of the first opportunities for cities to get involved, Moen said.

"We've been progressive in trying to find ways as we grow to keep searching for alternatives to help us manage traffic into the future," Moen said.

Right now, the data goes one way - from the city's [traffic](#) signal network to vehicles. The hope is that vehicles will eventually share information in real time with the city, he said.

"We'd love to know where people are going and travel times - how long did it take them to travel from point A to point B," Moen said.

Maso said this new [technology](#) ties in with the announcement last week that Frisco would be among the first beneficiaries of Uber's effort to build a network of on-demand flying cars or VTOLs (vertical takeoff and landing) aircraft.

Hillwood Properties has agreed to build vertical skyports at its developments. The first leg to be developed will be from the new Frisco Station project to Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport.

"We're a progressive city. We're innovative in everything we do," Maso said. "Why not in this?"

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