Ohio capital launches unique 'Smart City' operating system

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Ohio's capital city unveiled an operating system on Thursday that will gather data for its pioneering smart city transportation project.

Columbus beat out six other mid-sized cities in 2016 to win the U.S. Department of Transportation's Smart City Challenge, a contest aimed at encouraging innovative ideas for moving people and goods more quickly, cheaply and efficiently.

The effort is supported by a $40 million federal grant and $10 million from billionaire investor Paul Allen's Vulcan Inc. It has the potential to reduce collisions, speed first responder response times, curb freeway delays and get products to consumers faster.

Columbus Mayor Andrew Ginther said launching the Smart Columbus Operating System is a major milestone on Columbus' smart city journey, allowing officials to better analyze, interpret and share data that will help solve critical challenges and inspire innovation.

But the Democrat said the ultimate goal is to make life better.

"Fundamental to 'becoming smart' as a city is discovering how to use data to improve city services and quality of life for residents," he said. "When we apply data to the challenges we experience as a city, we can transform outcomes in education, employment, healthcare and even access to healthy food."

The city's Smart Columbus team will manage and distribute 1,100 data feeds through the new operating platform to government offices and private companies.

The information that's collected will help Columbus integrate self-driving cars, connected vehicles, smart sensors and other developing transportation technologies into the life of the city.

The city won its spot as the testing ground over San Francisco; Pittsburgh; Denver; Portland, Oregon; Austin, Texas; and Kansas City, Missouri.

Thursday's operating system launch comes amid efforts by Republican Ohio Gov. John Kasich to advance smart transportation technology statewide.

Kasich signed an executive order last week authorizing autonomous vehicle research to take place on all public roads across the state. The order laid out safety parameters for such projects and creates a voluntary pilot program linking local governments to participating companies.

The order extended Kasich's efforts to make Ohio a hub of smart vehicle research and development.