

From 4/10/14 DTC Meeting

To: Common Council Organizational Committee

From: Digital Technology Committee

Re: 3rd Party/Public Access to Traffic Cameras (Legistar File #33065, 'Surveillance Cameras')

At its first meeting, and as its first real item of business, the Digital Technology Committee (DTC) discussed expanding access to the Madison Traffic cameras beyond the city staff who currently have access.

The impetus for our discussion was a request from Traffic Engineering to provide real-time access to Madison Traffic Cameras to other Transportation Departments, most notably the state DOT. As surveillance cameras are an area which the city has treaded carefully in the past, some believed that having a discussion for how such a request should be handled, and if there any policy questions to be reconsidered.

As a refresher, Madison runs a large number of cameras (328) for many purposes: cameras watching traffic flows to help TE understand the traffic situation, traditional in-building security cameras in many city facilities, and perhaps most controversially, cameras watching public spaces such as State Street. The Common Council adopted a resolution in September of 2008 in Legislative File 10158 directing City Agencies with cameras to adopt written policies to govern their use; these directions were further codified in APM 3-17, and most agencies with cameras have in fact filed their written policies. IT Staff has provided the DTC with many examples, all of which are available on Legistar.

The subset of cameras Traffic Engineering would like to share with other transportation departments fall under these policies, however, they are likely of the least concern for privacy for the public and for city staff, which is the motivation for the policy.

The DTC is NOT recommending any changes to existing surveillance camera policy, but recognizes that the current request does not necessarily fit existing policy.

The DTC Recommendations are:

1. The DTC recommends that Traffic Engineering be given the go-ahead to share traffic camera streams from a limited number of cameras with other transportation departments without delay.
2. The DTC recommends that the Public Safety Review Board and area Alders be informed of the traffic cameras to be shared, now and in the future, along with the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Transit and Parking Commission. A formal policy should be considered but may not be necessary.
3. The DTC believes it is in the public interest to provide access to traffic cameras to all interested city residents, and that City IT and City Channel staff should investigate how to do so.

The DTC does not believe that it is the appropriate body to drive the discussions of recommendation #1 or #2. It may have a small role to play with recommendation #3, but otherwise believes that is largely a staff driven process, and is best overseen by the Mayor's office and perhaps the TPC.

To expand further on our recommendations:

1. Traffic Engineering has been waiting patiently for the go-ahead to provide traffic camera feeds to other regional transportation officials, and has already waited several months for the DTC to get this far. Traffic cameras are already widely in use, and are of little use to identify the people who may be in their field of view. There has been little pushback from the public in terms of privacy with fixed traffic cameras. A reasonable person should be able to quickly determine if the cameras that Traffic Engineering would like to share would fall into this same set of non-controversial cameras. Traffic Cameras have been effective tools transportation departments have been using to help monitor and manage traffic flow, and to identify bottlenecks and work to relieve them quickly. Allowing others in the region to know the situation in Madison would improve regional flow.

2. Not all cases of camera uses are as cut and dry as say a camera at the intersection of the Interstate and the Beltline. Sharing camera feeds, and expanded the number of people who have access to the camera far beyond the individuals listed in the agency reports, could use some sort of oversight beyond City Staff. The CCOC should consider some process, perhaps as simple as notification to the PSRB, the EOC, and the TPC, or perhaps requiring formal approval by some or all of those bodies. The EOC should be included, in the discussion of a process and in the actual process to ensure that camera deployment and the expanded uses do not take on even the appearance of site selection by an area's racial or economic means demographics. The extent of the policy is a discussion for the CCOC or other city bodies.

3. The DTC believes that beyond other transportation departments, Madisonians in general would benefit from having access to real-time traffic cameras, too. The State DOT makes many of its cameras available online, and indeed the Madison City Channel broadcasts DOT traffic camera feeds. Be it for more accurate information from Katie Austin of @madisontraffic, or for individuals planning their own trips, making the rich data the City has available to its citizens makes it possible to better plan and to feel in control of their own lives, and is a worthy goal. Provided it can be done for a reasonable cost, the city IT staff should make some traffic cameras available to everyone in Madison who wishes to view them, and not just other transportation departments.

With this memo, the DTC believes that it has completed its work with surveillance cameras, and that any follow-up is best driven by other bodies. We would, of course, do our best to complete any follow-up you believe is appropriate for us.

We look forward to working with you on other issues in the future to make Madison a better place for all its residents.