By Tom Nokes / Updated: 06 Jun 2019

London Underground to use passengers' Wi-Fi data to improve services

Submitted by Tom Nokes on 31 May 2019

Picture:

Country:
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Topic:
Collective passenger transport

Body:

In 2016, an innovative pilot that collected depersonalised Wi-Fi data from customers on London Underground demonstrated how technology could be used to reduce overcrowding and prioritise transport investment. The trial was undertaken by Transport for London (TfL), which is responsible for transport in the UK capital.

When a device has Wi-Fi enabled, it will continually search for a Wi-Fi network by sending out a unique identifier - known as a Media Access Control address - to nearby routers as customers pass through stations. TfL's trial collected these Wi-Fi connection requests, which were automatically depersonalised and then analysed by TfL's in-house analytics team to help understand where customers were at particular points of their journeys.

Since the pilot, TfL has been working to understand how these data could be used to provide customers with new, more tailored information about their journeys - both before they travel and while they are using London's transport network. TfL also worked closely with key stakeholders and the UK's Information Commissioner's Office to ensure that privacy concerns and transparency were actively considered and addressed. Detailed digital mapping of all London Underground stations has also been undertaken to allow TfL to identify where Wi-Fi routers are located and to allow TfL to understand in detail how people move across the network and through stations.

From 8 July 2019, these data will now be collected across the London Underground network and later this year customers and TfL staff will begin to see the first benefits from the analysis of these data, which could include:

- Providing crowding data via the TfL website to help customers better plan their route across London;
- Making crowding data openly available, which could allow app developers, academics and businesses to further utilise the data for new products and services;
- Early warning via the TfL website and social media channels about congestion in ticket halls or on platforms, which will allow customers to alter their route;
- Providing TfL station staff with the latest information when they are giving customers assistance (particularly those with small children or with accessibility needs) as well as advising them about travel conditions on other parts of the network.

Lauren Sager Weinstein, Chief Data Officer at Transport for London said:

'The benefits this new depersonalised dataset could unlock across our network — from providing customers with better alerts about overcrowding to helping station staff have a better understanding of the network in near-real time — are enormous. By better understanding overall patterns and flows, we can provide better information to our customers and help

us plan and operate our transport network more effectively for all."

Click here to read the full press release, and visit TfL's Wi-Fi data collection page for more information on how and why TfL collects Wi-Fi connection data.

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Source: story first published by TfL on 22 May 2019

Link to full story:
https://tfl.gov.uk/info-for/media/press-releases/2019/may/tfl-to-give-customers-better-information-about-their-tube-journeys