Living Mobility
by Mobility & Transportation

Living Mobility is Objective

Spotlight on data use and transparency

In conversation with Mark Parsons, partner, Technology & Telecoms sector group

Living Mobility is objective and fosters consumer trust based on transparent data usage. Data is the key to mobility solutions in smart cities. But in order for consumers to accept these advanced solutions as part of the way that they live, they must be in a position to trust that their data will be collected and processed fairly and responsibly. Mark Parsons discusses the role of transparency in building consumer trust and optimizing data-enabled initiatives.

What should the mobility and transportation industry keep in mind about data-driven mobility solutions in smart cities?

Parsons: As data-driven mobility solutions develop, we must consider best practices for public usage of private information, particularly within the public-private partnerships that are often essential to making smart cities possible. Data protection regulations are now in place in most jurisdictions in the world. But compliance requirements are only part of the discussion.

Technology develops much more quickly than legislative frameworks, and in the data protection realm, laws tend to be "principles-based" rather than fixing specific standards. We therefore see industry standards as being key to the mission of achieving public trust. To take a few examples, Internet of Things (IoT) solutions, such as sensors in the home that track temperatures and sensors in smart traffic lights can enable solutions that improve quality of life, but consumer responses to these solutions vary. Acceptance requires trust that general legislative requirements may struggle to achieve on their own. Standards can help build trust in these contexts.

What are some examples of different consumer responses to public use of private data?

Parsons: There are many. Facial recognition certainly divides opinion, as do other AI-enabled identification technologies. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen a new flashpoint in contact tracing technologies, which have generated very different responses in different countries. This highlights the extent to which demand for transparency varies across jurisdictions, including those in Asia.

How are data-driven mobility solutions developing in Asia?

Parsons: Many Asian jurisdictions benefit from advanced wireless networks and high consumer uptake of smartphones and other forms of mobile connectivity. It follows that we have seen success in creating open data platforms that allow access to real-time transit schedules and live traffic conditions to develop mobility solutions.

Development depends on numerous factors like incentives and environment.

Singapore, for example, has identified technological innovation as a clear strategic goal. Law and regulatory policy is often closely aligned with this objective, and so we see Singapore incentivizing innovative developments and even introducing certain relaxations of its data protection laws to create more space for innovation.

What is the relationship between data usage transparency and data privacy laws?

Parsons: Data privacy laws fix minimum mandatory standards for transparency. However, compliance with legal requirements does not mean that consumer trust will necessarily follow. Part of the challenge in Asia is that data privacy laws differ from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. We are seeing a recasting of data privacy laws across the region in the wake of General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and this holds promise that in some areas at least, there can be convergence towards common global fundamentals. No system will be perfect, but a considered approach to transparency in data-driven mobility solutions prioritizes the trust of citizens from the beginning.

If there's one thing that will impede consumer acceptance of data-driven mobility solutions and smart cities, it's a lack of trust. As privacy laws in the region align around concepts such as data breach notification and accountability models, we see privacy laws as a potential enabler of trust. But in my view, the law can only go so far in this regard and in certain areas at least, industry standards hold promise as both an effective way to manage risk and serve as a communication tool for the public.

How can public-private partnerships address public trust deficits to work towards consumer acceptance of data-driven mobility solutions?

Parsons: It is clear that there is a deficit of public trust in mobility solutions in certain jurisdictions, both in Asia and elsewhere. Lawmakers need to move to address this. There is general enthusiasm for these solutions and how they can improve our lives. Lawmakers should

recognize the benefits they can bring, but at the same time develop approaches that take on board the need for transparency. Public-private partnerships can move transparency forward, combining the technical knowledge found in industry with appropriate public sector oversight.
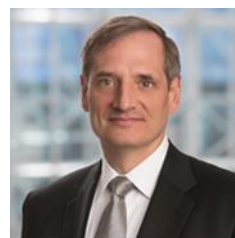
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