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Date: 8-10-11

Submitted in Trans Committee

Council File No: 11-1333

Item No.: 6

Deputy: [Signature]

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Critical vendor replaced before SFpark launch

By Mark Albertson, SF Technology Examiner
February 22nd, 2011 7:58 am PT

The SFpark program of monitoring parking spaces around the city using computers, the largest project of its kind in the world, will be starting this spring after changing the vendor who supplies the key sensor technology just a few months ago.

As previously reported in this column, the SFpark program was originally designed to operate using parking space sensors supplied by Streetline, a San Francisco company. Though there has still been no formal announcement of a change, this column has confirmed that last fall, top managers of SFpark decided that Streetline's sensors would have to be removed and replaced with technology provided by StreetSmart instead.

The reasons for this change are tough to pin down. Many people close to the project are extremely reluctant to discuss in any detail why, after over 18 months of work, the supplier for the most important element of the ambitious parking space monitoring program suddenly needed to be changed.

Streetline declined to make available for interview any manager associated with the project, but did issue the following statement: "Post the initial deployment, Streetline was asked to continue on the project as part of a dual vendor strategy. However, we decided to end our participation in the project as we could not reach agreement on contractual terms."

However, Julie Dixon of Serco, the company/contractor hired by the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Authority (SFMTA) with overall responsibility for the project, was more specific. "Streetline did not meet the performance standards specified in the contract," said Dixon.

ACS (Affiliated Computer Services - a Xerox company) is the subcontractor for the project. Representatives from ACS also declined to be interviewed for this story and would not comment on the reasons for Streetline's



replacement.

Though most of the Streetline sensors can be seen in parking spaces throughout the city (StreetSmart's sensors are barely visible since they are flush mounted in the pavement), ACS did confirm that all previously installed Streetline sensors would soon be removed at no cost to the city of San Francisco. None of the Streetline sensors are currently active. There are over 8,000 sensors involved in the initial rollout of the project.

The SFpark project is one of the most difficult ever undertaken. "San Francisco is a very harsh environment for this kind of technology," said Kirby Andrews of StreetSmart. A potent combination of overhead trolley car wires, large underground PG&E cables, and heavy cellphone traffic can play havoc with a street level sensor that must know when a car is in a space and communicate that to a centralized data system 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

To overcome these problems, StreetSmart developed what is essentially a noise canceling filter for their sensors, similar in concept to noise blocking headphones frequent flyers wear.

Meanwhile, if you venture to Sausalito, north of San Francisco, or Hollywood in Los Angeles, you'll park in spaces already monitored by Streetline's sensors. According to Jonathon Goldman, Sausalito's Director of Public Works, the sensors in his city are "performing adequately."

Sausalito uses the sensors to keep track of when a car has been parked over the time limit. "We do not want to write a citation that is not valid," said Goldman, who did say that some of the tickets issued since the system began had to be rescinded after it was discovered that the monitoring data was incorrect.

Streetline appears to be having more success in Hollywood. Approximately 800 of their sensors have been installed on neighborhood streets and their data is fed into a mobile application that lets motorists know where to find an open space. "We've been real pleased with the outcome so far," said Bruce Gillman of the Los Angeles Department of Transportation.

The SFpark project is scheduled to go "live" within the next 30 to 90 days. Strap on your seatbelts, San Francisco drivers. This could be a wild ride.

Tags: SFpark, Streetline, StreetSmart, SFMTA



Painters & Allied Trades DISTRICT COUNCIL 36

GRANT MITCHELL
Business Manager

DRYWALL FINISHERS, FLOORLAYERS, GLAZIERS, PAINTERS, TRADESHOW & SIGNCRAFT

June 28, 2011

Councilman Bill Rosendahl
City of Los Angeles, Council District 11
Chairman, Transportation Committee
200 N. Spring Street, Room 415
Los Angeles, CA 90012

RE: LA Express Park

Dear Chairman Rosendahl,

We are writing to you today to address an issue with the LA Express Park, a project that will ease traffic congestion, improve the ease of parking Downtown and modernize parking meter monitoring and technology.

As you likely know, we are the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades, District Council 36, a labor union of more than 11,000 men and women in Southern California. Our members work in the finishing trades and include painters, drywall finishers, glaziers, floorlayers, and tradeshow & signcraft workers. District Council 36 provides our contractors with highly trained, skilled, and safety-conscious workers who are prepared to meet the challenges of today's workplace.

We are uncomfortable with the direction that ACS, the recommended vendor for this project, is heading in its selection of sub-vendors for the LA Express Park project. Specifically, we are concerned about the problems associated with Street Line Networks' ability to deliver on the project given their most recently attempted deployment in San Francisco.

Street Line defaulted on their contract and had to be replaced shortly before the project was to be on-line. It had the potential to jeopardize the success of the entire program.

In the SF Park project, Street Line Networks was retained to provide the in-street parking space monitoring system. Despite many months and numerous opportunities to deploy, they were simply unable. Their product was unable to meet acceptable accuracy standards and there are latency issues with the transmission of data – both of which will jeopardize motorist confidence in the system and create unnecessary parking ticket appeals.

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As workers in this arena, our concern is that we are backing people and projects that can get the job done. At this juncture, we are doubtful that Street Line Networks will be able to complete the job if selected. We would recommend that the City take a very hard look into alternatives with experience in the smart parking meter industry.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert Smith", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Robert Smith
Political Director