Learn who’s tracking your phone as you drive

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ORANGE COUNTY, Fla. — There's a new way to improve traffic flow on Central Florida's roads, and it involves the government latching onto your Bluetooth device as you drive by.

WESH 2's Amanda Ober is investigating Bluetooth trackers and how they're being used to measure traffic flow and speed on many of the roads we all use for travel.

Some people said they are worried it's a little too "Big Brother."

WESH 2 found that drivers traveling on Central Florida roads will, at some point, be seen by a traffic camera. But there's another way that drivers are being tracked.

All over Central Florida are devices that are mounted on poles that allow the government to connect to any Bluetooth device inside a driver's vehicle. The devices are called Bluetooth trackers, and many drivers may not notice them.

Florida Department of Transportation engineer Jeremy Dilmore said the Bluetooth signals from people's smartphones are helping to re-time traffic lights on major roads as the need arises.

Here's how it works: The trackers read the identification number of any activated Bluetooth device in cars that pass by. When drivers pass the next Bluetooth tracker, their travel time is recorded. That real-time data allows FDOT to stay on top of traffic flow, as well as back-ups and accidents. But if learning FDOT is tracking your devices makes you a little uncomfortable, you're not alone.

"I really don't like the government trying to find out where my tires have gone," said driver-for-hire John Fiacable.

Fiacable has been a driver for hire most of his life and spends his days on the road. He fears government intrusion on his privacy.

"Nothing is private anymore," Fiacable said.

But FDOT would disagree.

"There's nothing that can be matched back to an individual," Dilmore said.

Dilmore said the Bluetooth trackers drop part of the address for the driver's device, meaning there is no way for them to know to whom the device belongs, or even who is in the car.

"We have no records of it whatsoever. So the only thing we're interested in is the travel time," Dilmore said.

The Bluetooth trackers cost from $2,000 to $3,000 each and cost about $500 a year to operate and maintain.

They were paid for by FDOT.

Seminole and Orange counties, as well as the city of Orlando, purchased additional devices with a combination of federal and local dollars.