

Traffic dodging apps prompt cities to game the algorithms

By Elizabeth Weise, USA Today

Call it planners versus algorithms.

Smartphone apps like Waze, a godsend for some road warriors because they shave minutes and even hours off their commutes with their creative detours off main highways, are causing headaches for city planners.

Using crosswalks, wider sidewalks and traffic lights, these transportation engineers aim to make neighborhood traffic slow, safe, and friendly for pedestrians – not send frustrated commuters barreling down side roads.

But the GPS-enabled computer programs often don't know that, or care. Their creators, such as Waze (owned by Google), are sympathetic, to a degree. They may give cities tips on how to effectively game the program so a neighborhood detour doesn't seem that appealing. But at the end of the day, the purpose of the bots is to make use of all available road space, main thoroughfare or country lane.

The upshot is mounting frustration from cities, which are trying to thwart computer systems that are savvier than ever.

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