

Case Study

School Buses Tracked by GPS Capabilities and a BlackBerry Smartphone



Company: Paulding County School District in Georgia includes 28 schools and more than 20,000 students.

Industry: Education/Transportation

Region: Americas

Company Size: Large Enterprise - 370 employees

Email Environment: Novell® GroupWise®

Type of Solution: Field Service, CRM & Dispatch Operations

BlackBerry Partner Solution: Comet Tracker from Act Soft Inc.

Challenge: A busy transportation manager wanted a mobile device that would relay GPS information on the movement of county school buses while he was away from his desktop computer.

Solution: The School district now uses Comet Tracker, a wireless GPS application from Act Soft Inc. With the Comet Tracker application on BlackBerry smartphones, they now have a solution to look up and pinpoint every GPS-tracked bus in the school district.

Results:

- Improved operations management
- Accurate decision making
- Faster responses
- More free time



The Challenge: Monitor GPS Information While Mobile

It's no small challenge knowing where 20,000 students are each day as they're bused between 28 schools and numerous after-school events. Yet Jim Black, Assistant Director of Transportation at Paulding County School District in Georgia, must know exactly where his 280 buses are at all times.

For awhile that meant back and forth conversations on cell phones or two-way radios. Things changed for the better when each bus was equipped with GPS-enabled devices that sent their coordinates back to a central tracking system. But for Black, this still meant he had to be at his desktop computer to see where his buses were.

"I'm out of my office about 75% of the time at driver locations, when there are bus incidents, and a lot of things happen after hours when I'm not in my office anyway," he says. "Having GPS on the buses did no good when I could not get to the data."

Black knew he needed to find a way to see GPS information on a device he could take with him when he left the office. Otherwise, he was back to square one, calling drivers or dispatchers to get status updates.

Why BlackBerry?

When Black saw someone demonstrate wireless GPS capabilities on a BlackBerry smartphone, he knew he had the answer. The BlackBerry smartphone impressed him because it looked easy to use. "There are just a few buttons that do everything, you can't get much easier than that," says Black.

He also knew he'd find it valuable to carry his emergency contact list with him all the time. The Contact List on his BlackBerry smartphone automatically synchs up with his Novell GroupWise address book on his desktop computer; when he needs to call someone urgently, he knows he has the most up-to-date information with him.

When he found out that he could have a wireless application called Comet Tracker relay GPS information to his BlackBerry smartphone, it all came together. The BlackBerry® Enterprise Solution is designed to support third-party applications that securely transmit information collected in the field to BlackBerry smartphones and corporate systems.

Comet Tracker is a transportation management application that uses GPS tracking technology to provide fleet management, labor and job tracking on-the-spot. "It was relatively easy software to learn," says Black. "Before I received any training, I was able to try things out and pretty much understand what I needed to do."

Accurate Information from the Road

Using Comet Tracker on his BlackBerry smartphone, Black can pinpoint where his school buses are at all times. That's important when he's called by a school principal who wants to know how far away a bus is from a location. When this involves an after-school game or field trip, where parents are waiting, the calls come more frequently. Before, he'd have to radio the dispatcher who would radio the driver and then report back to him so he could call back to the principal.

"Now, I just look up the bus number on the GPS map on my BlackBerry smartphone and I can estimate the time of arrival based on established routes I know they take," explains Black. "It makes operations easier to manage, but it also give parents and schools peace of mind. They now have someone on the other end of the phone who can answer questions basically at the same moment they're being asked."

Partner Profile:



Company: ActSoft, Inc.

- Leading developer of mobile management and GPS location tracking software
- Offers solutions with built-in GPS services on wireless devices such as Comet Tracker, Comet Tracker Lite, Comet Transportation, Cyber Tracker Powered by Comet Tracker and Oreis Mobile by Comet Tracker

Featured Product:

Comet Tracker

Application Type:

Field Service, CRM & Dispatch Operations

Business Value:

"I'm very familiar with GPS technologies and I've been very impressed with the capabilities of Comet Tracker. The ease of use is tremendous. There was not a big learning curve."

~ JIM BLACK, Assistant Director of Transportation

For more information, visit www.actsoft.com

Accurate information is also important when Black is contacted by the Superintendent for his school district. When he's called at 9 pm on a Friday night and asked how many buses are still on the road, he can answer with complete certainty using his BlackBerry smartphone.

"It's our job as Directors to provide answers to our Superintendent so she can do her job well," says Black. "I no longer guesstimate this information. I can tell her exactly what she needs to know to make recommendations and answer information from the Board of Education."

Black finds he's improved his own ability to balance work time with free time. Before, he would have to be ready for phone calls until the last school bus finished its run. Now he can refer to the Comet Tracker map on his BlackBerry smartphone, and get a sense of when he can shut off from his work day. "The biggest thing it allows me to do is sleep better," he says. "I don't feel like I'm on call all the time as I did before."

Responsiveness When It's Needed

Faster incident response is also something Black gets with Comet Tracker on his BlackBerry smartphone. If there's a disciplinary incident on a bus, or an accident, he needs to get to the location quickly.

"Anything involving a school bus is a monumental task because we're charged with transporting students safely from one place to another," he says. "Any quick and accurate information I can get my hands on makes the transportation role a million times easier to deal with."

In the event of an accident, Black feels he will now save valuable travel time to the location. He will no longer have to contact a driver in a time of crisis to get detailed directions because he can look up the bus's location himself on his smartphone.

Dispatchers will also be freed up from giving status reports to focus on helping onsite personnel. "The dispatchers can look after helping the driver and organizing any medical response or law enforcement services, rather than needing to relay information to people like me," he says.



"I don't feel I'd be as good at my job, and have the information people need from me, if I did not have a BlackBerry smartphone. It doesn't do my job for me, but it does it with me."

Jim Black

Assistant Director of Transportation
Paulding County School District

For more information on solutions for BlackBerry, visit www.blackberry.com/go/success

Results

Helps with Operations Management: Black looks up exact locations of school buses, using Comet Tracker on his BlackBerry smartphone, so he can accurately report their arrival times to school authorities and parents.

Accurate Decision Making: Because Black can easily and accurately assess bus traffic for the Superintendent of his School Board, he supports her ability to make better management decisions.

Faster Responses: In an accident or disciplinary incident involving a bus, Black no longer has to rely on dispatchers or drivers to relay the location – which helps him arrive on site faster and reduces the load on the dispatcher.

More Free Time: Black doesn't have to stay on call as much waiting for the phone to ring because he can easily check the status of all buses at any time.

"With my BlackBerry smartphone and the Comet Tracker application, I get an instant picture of where our school buses are, from wherever I need to be. It releases me from having to be in my office all the time."

~JIM BLACK, Assistant Director of Transportation

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