

Trust, Transparency, and Technology: Building Digital Equity

Through a Civic Digital Commons

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Award Type: PG (2234081)



Project Vision

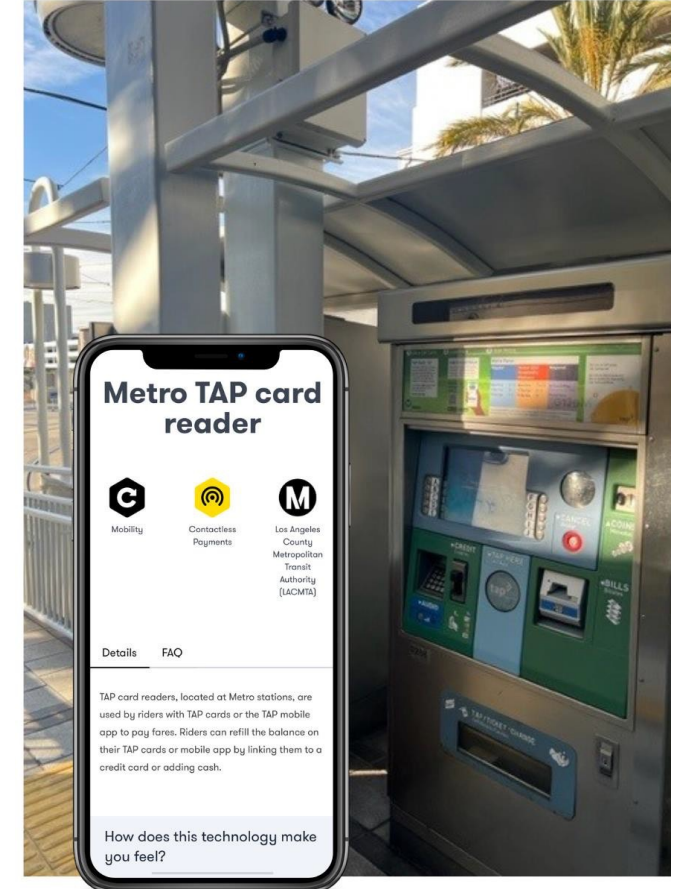
Findings from our pilot studies suggest that excessive surveillance by the City of Long Beach reinforces a sense of insecurity and leads residents to fear civil liberties violations, particularly among BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) communities. In response, we are deploying a Digital Rights Platform featuring text and iconography that visually convey how the City of Long Beach uses specific technologies, what data devices collect and how the City utilizes those data.

We are mounting data privacy notices in Long Beach neighborhoods, physically adjacent to or digitally embedded within civic technologies, e.g., surveillance cameras, mobile payment kiosks, public WiFi routers. These signs feature a QR code that takes users to an online platform detailing how the City uses and stores data from that device, who can access those data, and more. Users can also leave comments for local officials. The ultimate goal is to enable agency over data use, through an opt-out function. Our RQs examine 1) how the Digital Rights Platform impacts residents' attitudes/comfort levels when interacting with smart city tech, 2) whether increasing transparency and accountability fosters trust, and 3) what implications exist for cities deploying technologies that store, analyze and share personal data about residents?

Can you picture this?
Security Cameras
¿Puedes imaginarte esto? Cámaras de seguridad



Learn how Long Beach uses your data to improve City services >>>
Descubre cómo Long Beach utiliza sus datos para mejorar los servicios de la ciudad.



Intellectual Merit

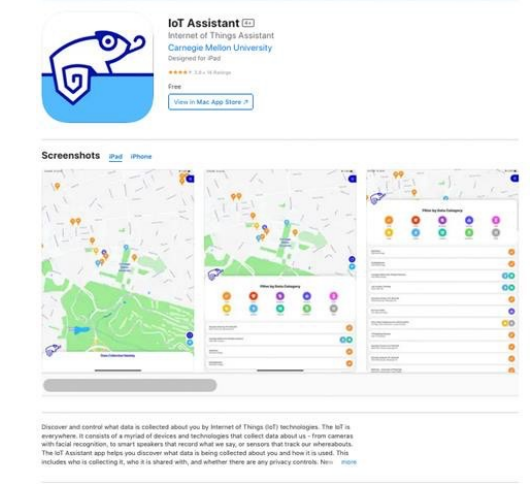
This multidisciplinary project offers an innovative, scalable methodology for determining public acceptance of privacy-invasive software platforms and devices deployed by municipal government. The research will inform efforts to create a viable pathway for shifting the smart city paradigm away from corporate-driven technology deployments to resident-driven decision-making—potentially influencing how technology developers themselves design their products and services. Additionally, our project offers community members an array of opportunities to inform solutions.

Progress

- To date, our research team has:
- Designed and mounted data privacy notices for 24 civic technologies, and built an online platform with individual landing pages for each technology.
 - Designed focus groups and data walks to obtain resident feedback on the Digital Rights Platform. We are working with community partners and elected officials to disseminate a recruitment flyer and link to the data walk registration website.
 - Jotto developers customized a mobile app for data walk participants to audio or video record responses to prompts.

Broader Impact

Long Beach's Digital Rights Platform makes data practices associated with smart technologies more transparent for all of Long Beach's nearly 500,000 residents. By actively involving BIPOC community members, the Digital Rights Platform has the potential to ease racial tensions and bolster trust in the Long Beach Police Department—and local government, generally. In addition, the project will serve as a model for meaningful partnerships among community stakeholders, local policymakers, industry and academia. Finally, this research offers an important rejoinder to the lack of effective federal and state data privacy regulations.



Future Goals

The next phase of the research involves working with privacy engineers at Carnegie Mellon University to develop a “privacy assistant” mobile app that enables Long Beach residents to set privacy preferences and, when feasible, opt out of data collection from smart City technologies such as from the City's 311 app, its parking meter app and public WiFi hotspots. This moves Long Beach closer to becoming the first city in California to comply with the spirit of the California Consumer Privacy Act. We also plan to host community education workshops for residents interested in better understanding the City of Long Beach's broader efforts to implement meaningful data privacy governance practices. Finally, our research team intends to work with adjacent local governments to scale the digital rights platform, and create a guide for government officials from cities nationwide interested in launching their own Digital Rights Platform.