

Islip's Checking Its Pocket with G.P.S. Units in Cars

By Nicole Cotroneo Aug. 5, 2007

WILL employees of the Town of Islip who drive government vehicles have more incentive not to misuse them when Big Brother is riding shotgun?

Islip has begun installing global positioning systems in its 614 town-owned licensed vehicles, including ones driven by public works employees, code enforcement investigators, management personnel and Town Board members. Philip Nolan, the town supervisor, said the devices would help keep tabs on the vehicles while reducing fuel expense.

“Management controls of assets are very lacking here,” said Mr. Nolan, a Democrat who ended the Republicans’ three-decade hold on the supervisor’s position last November. “You have to generate data, and you have to then look at the data. I know this kind of system makes sense.”

While Mr. Nolan said he had not seen evidence that employees had abused their car privileges, “there has always been anecdotal information circulating.”

Islip’s setup is more extensive than the one that the Town of Brookhaven hopes to begin soon with G.P.S. units in 200 of its 650 town-owned vehicles. Brookhaven has budgeted \$250,000.

Unlike the Islip plan, Brookhaven's would not include elected officials, but would be for officials like fire marshals, public safety officers and waste management inspectors.

Brookhaven's push for G.P.S. units follows a study of the use of town-owned vehicles over the past 18 months that estimated that 500,000 miles were clocked by drivers on arbitrary or unauthorized assignments, said Tom Burke, a town spokesman.

"Upon taking office, we determined the policies and procedures that governed the use of vehicles were either nonexistent, loosely enforced or absolutely outdated," he said. "People were using autos for commutation purposes that perhaps should not have been. There was heavy gas credit card use, which was not tracked with the actual mileage on the car."

As a result, Brookhaven is having employees fill up at a town service center, not commercial gas stations, to reduce costs.

Mr. Nolan said the G.P.S. units for Islip were the first of a series of reforms involving town-owned vehicles that he intended to introduce, but he said the rest would not be announced for a few weeks.

The town does not know how much unauthorized mileage there may have been in the past because there was not sufficient record-keeping, a town spokeswoman said. But close monitoring of mileage and gasoline use will deter unauthorized use and identify any misuse, she said.

A G.P.S. manager will monitor the data from the units daily, Mr. Nolan said, randomly selecting vehicles to match where they

have gone to what the drivers were scheduled to do that day. If there appears to be a discrepancy, an investigator will be dispatched to do a field check, he said.

Once all the systems are in place, around mid-August, the town will monitor vehicles in real time, the town said.

Mr. Nolan said he had a G.P.S. unit installed in his government car. "If you have to lead, then you should do it by example," he said.

Councilman Christopher D. Bodkin, who had a unit installed in his vehicle in early July, said he supported use of the tracking system.

"It's a public vehicle," he said. "This maintains that it's being used for public use and not being driven to Atlantic City on the weekend."

But Councilman Steven J. Flotteron said Mr. Nolan was sending the wrong message to employees by tracking their every move. "He's treating all the employees like criminals," he said. "They're not going to want to work if they feel uncomfortable and paranoid."

Mr. Flotteron, who has chosen not to drive a government vehicle, said the \$89,000 spent on the G.P.S. program would have been better spent on improving roads. (Islip arranged a deal with 184 free devices and the rest for 99 cents each.)

HE FORGOT TO TELL YOU HE GETS EXTRA PAY FOR NOT TAKING THE CAR- THEY ALL DO, EVEN FOR HEALTH INSURANCE!

“I’m not saying G.P.S. is bad,” he said. “But that’s what we have foremen for.” **(WHOM APPROVE THE ABUSE)**

Mr. Nolan said the issue was not only tracking potential abuse. **Currently 169 town vehicles are driven home each night, and he said that is too many because of fuel and maintenance costs. Fuel costs about \$1 million a year, he said.**

“There’s got to be a reason for them to have that orange-and-blue truck in front of their house,” Mr. Nolan said. “Fire marshals have equipment in their vehicles that they need to respond to fires. There is a good reason for them to drive their vehicles home.”

The G.P.S. manager, Steve Hicks, has experience as a systems analyst for the Internal Revenue Service. He was also the voluntary treasurer for Mr. Nolan’s campaign. The position’s salary comes out of the supervisor’s budget, which was set before he took office, Mr. Nolan said.

The vehicle fleet is “an expensive set of resources,” he said, and the G.P.S. units — plus equipment used to record fuel expenditures — will help the town manage these resources “more effectively.” While Mr. Nolan could not estimate the savings, he said he expected them to be substantial.

But Mr. Flotteron maintained that Mr. Nolan had another motive for using tracking technology. “This is an ‘I gotcha’ thing,” he said.

VERY SAD REMARK AND UNACCEPTABLE!