Obsolete Infrastructure

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Progress creates new forms of infrastructure and then renders them useless as seen with telegraphs, satellite dishes, newspaper dispensers, and pay phones. They had a good run over the past century, but they now litter cities like carcasses of decades past. I became enamored with them as if they were ancient while doing my research and looking for urban interventions. It was only a short time ago that I viewed TV commercials touting the advances in technologies that are now referred to as "old school." The movies I grew up with always had them. They were once an essential piece to an urban landscape and now accumulate rust and graffiti.

I could not stop thinking about them and would constantly bring them up as an example during discussions because I believed they had a potential for something great.

I present :

Link NYC

It was one of those instances where you realize someone had already beaten you to an idea. New York City has taken their old pay phone infrastructure and have begun to convert them into modern WFI stations. These Kiosks will now provide free internet access to anyone with wifi capable devices within the city.

The ambitious project does not stop there. This connection is not just basic wifi, "Some New York content creators

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producing massive amounts of content, such as HD videos, are now hauling their laptops down to the street for faster uploading." [1] Link NYC will have gigabyte-speed wifi and USB charging ports within their anticipated 6,000 units that are being implemented into the city. With a connection range of 400 feet, some "New Yorkers won't actually need mobile contracts anymore". [1]

" If the concept can make it there, it can make it anywhere." [1]

The project is being funded by creating advertisement space on the side of the units with 55" digital screens. Not only does this fund initial start up costs of the project but the "city stands to make $500 million off the screens over the 12 years of CityBridge's contract" [2]

This is a perfect step between our urban and digital interventions as it takes an area of blight in the city and transforms it into a functional amenity that not only benefits the citizens but generates a stronger community. Everyone now has access to the digital geography that continues to permeate from our devices into the physical realm. Not only do the LinkNYC kiosks provide wifi, but they also carry with them

[1] Mike Elgan, "How smart cities like New York City will drive enterprise change," Computerworld, July 29, 2017
[2] Janet Stilson, "What It Means for Consumers and Brands That New York Is Becoming a 'Smart City'," – Adweek, February 15, 2016

android tablets that can access browsing, calls, and options for voter registration. Projects like these help get citizens engaged in their local planning and help New York become a smart city.

To be a smart city means using technology to establish a system of data collection and using that information to make better predictions. This creates a more versatile city that is capable of adapting quicker based on the strength of its data collection. For New York, establishing a WIFI system for all of its citizens means investing in modern infrastructure and providing citizens with access to the growing digital culture. Looking locally, Chicago has been a leading city that aims to be an example for the city of tomorrow.

With a new data collection system called Array of Things, city officials will have access to real-time, location based data, which currently measure "temperature, barometric pressure, light, vibration, carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, ozone, ambient sound intensity, pedestrian and vehicle traffic, and surface temperature" [3], with room for expansion into other sensors in the future. If that does not impress you, the systems are measuring on a "block-by-block" scale and capable of updating residents of location specific occurrences, like flash floods for example. These systems mark a starting point for all cities to take ownership of the potential data that flows freely unrecorded. By harnessing this information, Chicago can be proactive in times of crisis or flexible when events are to be taken place.

The hope is that by also publishing this data to the public, these systems will improve efficiency as well as encourage other innovators to utilize the information for their neighborhoods. It opens doors to potential citizen intervention, other chances to engage the city and in the end, people will be able to use the Array of Things data, to improve their community together.
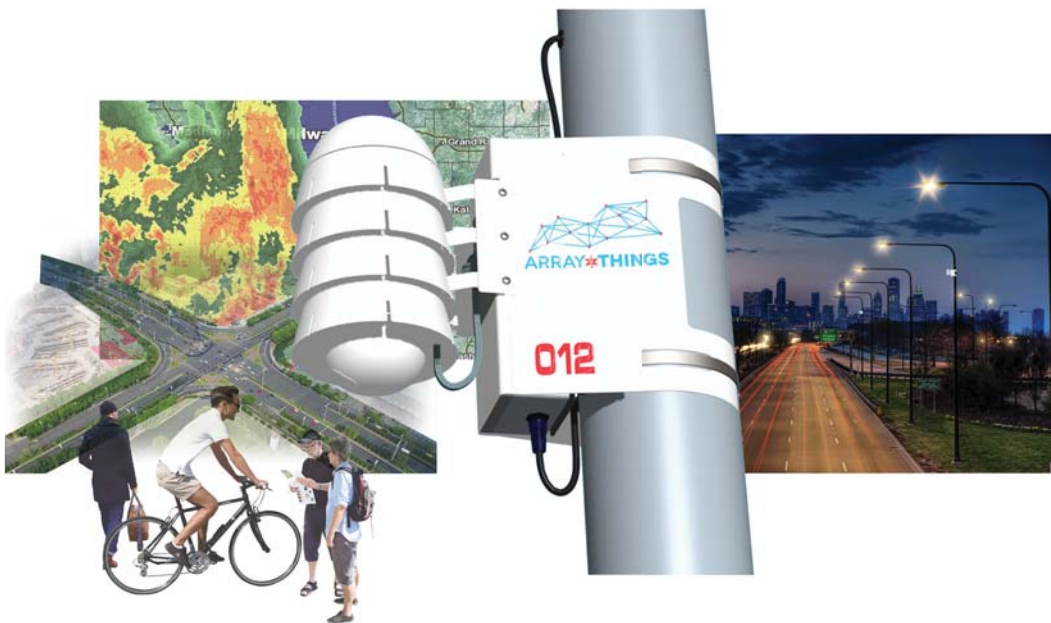
[3] "Chicago becomes first city to launch Array of Things," UChicago News,
May 26, 2017