**Talking You Through: Traffic Information and Car Radio, 1950s-now**

In today’s strategies for sustainable mobility, traffic information is considered to

contribute to efficient highway use. Car radio has played a crucial role in

transmitting such information. Its sonic character helps drivers to keep their eyes

on the road, and its real-time updates to keep them informed. However, the ways in

which radio traffic information is gathered, transmitted and presented differs from

country to country. Moreover, drivers do not only listen to car radio but also to

music, audio books, mobile phones, and navigation voices. What do such varying

presentation and listening practices mean for how drivers appropriate radio traffic

information and handle the tensions between traffic control and listening and driving

freedom?

This project examines the history and contemporary practices of traffic radio

in the United States, Germany and The Netherlands (1950s-now) to answer the

following sub-questions: (1) Which technologies and organizational forms have been

developed to gather and transmit traffic information across radio? (2) How has this

information been presented to drivers and embedded in radio programs? (3) How

has traffic information been appropriated by drivers, amidst competing listening

activities? (4) How can our historical-comparative understanding of traffic radio

inform us on high-quality traffic information today and contribute to sustainable

mobility?

We will gather and elicit our empirical material from (1) Archives and

publications of institutions involved in traffic radio (2) Archived radio programs and

oral history interviews with radio hosts (3) Past publications on user reception of

traffic radio as well as contemporary ethnographic research on listening-while-driving.

Our analysis of traffic radio will draw on the notions of “technology-in-use”

and “technological trajectory” from the History of Technology, “flow” from Media

Studies, and “listening modes” from Sound Studies. We will use our findings to (4)

inform a workshop with contemporary stakeholders organized in collaboration with

traffic psychologists.

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