

Would you Track Network Performance with a Helicopter?

When stuck in traffic, everyone dreams a little bit about the idea of being able to hover over the traffic jam in a helicopter to see what's really happening. Is it:

- A jackknifed big-rig?
- Road construction?
- Police ticketing someone for being in the carpool lane illegally?

In the pre-modern world, radio stations paid a lot of money to have traffic reporters in helicopters report what was going on:

“There is an overturned truck on highway 101 south at the 3rd avenue interchange which has backed up traffic for six miles—please use alternate routes.”

The helicopters could linger in certain spots while reporters delivered live updates on what was happening. Unfortunately, most radio stations had only one helicopter, so coverage only focused on major incidents. If you're not in the traffic mess of the day but still stuck, you may never know what was happening to cause route delay.

Fast forward to the present day: There are freeway sensors and traffic cameras located everywhere that report how traffic is moving. Waze™ provides even more information about what is happening at road-level. The result? Significantly more information which leads to better decisions about travel routes.

Compare this with a modern network infrastructure: Using a network analyzer type of solution to monitor your network's performance is like that helicopter. You get a live view of what is happening at one spot on the network at one point in time, but no understanding of how the infrastructure is operating as a whole.

In most networks, there are hundreds of links that could have problems that would lead to service disruptions or slowdowns. Putting analyzers on all of them would not be possible.

It would be better to use a Waze-like solution where information is gathered throughout the network – all links, switches, and routers in the infrastructure. And while you're at it, collect a wide variety of error counter, configuration, queueing, and performance information in those locations so you can determine what the problem is that's affecting traffic.

After all, who needs a helicopter when you've got something like Waze to tell you what's going on? Wouldn't you want the same visibility into your network?

