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Uber Extends an Olive Branch to Local Governments: Its Data.

The ride-hailing company Uber and local governments often do not play well together. Uber pays little heed to regulation while city officials scramble to keep up with the company's rapid deployment and surging popularity.

But now, with a new data-focused product, Uber is offering a tiny olive branch to its municipal critics.

The company on Sunday unveiled Movement, a stand-alone website it hopes will persuade city planners to consider Uber as part of urban development and transit systems in the future.

The site, which Uber will invite planning agencies and researchers to visit in the coming weeks, will allow outsiders to study traffic patterns and speeds across cities using data collected by tens of thousands of Uber vehicles. Users can use Movement to compare average trip times across certain points in cities and see what effect something like a baseball game might have on traffic patterns. Eventually, the company plans to make Movement available to the general public.

If urban planners embrace the data, that could work toward a future Uber has long dreamed of, one in which the company's transportation options are woven into municipal planning.

"Our relationships with cities have typically been uneven, but there are a lot of places around the world where Uber and the cities we operate in have the same goals," Andrew Salzberg, head of transportation policy at Uber, said in an interview. "We operate better in a world that has policy grounded on data."

The collected trip data is made anonymous and aggregated, Uber said, which it hopes will assuage user privacy concerns.

That data, Uber said, will most likely be much more reliable than what is typically used by urban planners, many of whom hire third-party agencies to study traffic patterns over time. Often, that data is expensive, and it can be out of date by the time it is analyzed. Uber argues that its data is more reliable because all of its drivers use smartphones equipped with accelerometers and global positioning technology.

One challenge for Uber: improving upon the rocky partnerships it forged in the early, one-off data sharing deals it struck two years ago.

In a widely publicized move in January 2015, Uber announced a deal with the city of Boston in which the company planned to share some anonymous data, with many of the same urban planning aspirations it has today.

But that deal quickly soured. Boston officials said the agreement was not practical for city planning and development because it restricted what agencies the city could share the data with and because

the data came only in quarterly batches. Boston city employees also grew frustrated with the lack of useful data being shared and Uber's seeming lack of understanding of how to deal with city governments.

"The totality of Uber and Lyft drivers in Boston represent what is effectively the addition of another transit line," Jascha Franklin-Hodge, chief information officer at Boston's Department of Innovation & Technology, said in an interview. "The fact that we're dealing with a whole new line that we don't have data on and can't integrate it into our planning is sort of ridiculous."

Uber seemed to take the criticism to heart. After the Boston partnership, the company created a Seattle-based team to develop an approach to sharing data with city planners across the world. Led by Jordan Gilbertson, a product manager at Uber, that project eventually became the new website, Movement.

City officials said that they appreciated user data privacy concerns but that they also hoped to see more useful information from Uber. Mr. Franklin-Hodge shared a list of detailed requests that could aid future urban development, like demand patterns around car-free tenant housing, locations with likely potholes and the most common pickup and drop-off locations.

Uber maintains that it plans to release more data to cities over time as it rolls out the Movement tool to a wider audience of researchers and to the public. But the company said it would balance that demand for information with concerns about user privacy and the need to protect competitive data that could prove valuable to rivals like Lyft, Hailo and Grab, which are vying for riders across many of the same markets.

"Ideally, we'll someday find what that middle ground looks like," Mr. Franklin-Hodge said.

THE NEW YORK TIMES

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JAN. 8, 2017

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