[PROFILE]

# Fine-Tuning Fleet with On-Board Diagnostics

## Affiliated Transportation has reduced maintenance, repair, and fuel costs by tracking OBD-II data

**By Jon LeSage**

Automobiles are now built with computer systems that turn them into something like Hal in "2001: A Space Odyssey." The good news: they're not out to get you. They're out to protect you.

Indianapolis, Ind.-based operator Affiliated Transportation learned this lesson in 2007 after installing Networkfleet's wireless fleet management system, which tracks and delivers data from each vehicle's OBD-II, the latest and greatest in onboard diagnostics. Dispatchers can monitor GPS-based location technology and real-time diagnostic information from each vehicle's engine, which is transmitted wirelessly.

During an initial test run, Affiliated found out one of its cars had conditions that soon would cause at least $6,600 in transmission damage restoration. Simple service work stopped this from happening. Since then, Affiliated has used the system to carefully track in-service fleet vehicles and correct any problems that can arise. This can boil down to vehicle idle time, speed, location, and maintenance issues.

### Controlling Fleet Costs

The operator started up in May 2003 as Capital City Coach, and in early 2008 formed a consortium with two other operators under the name Affiliated Transportation. The company runs a fleet of 23 vehicles — mostly Town Cars, but also SUVs, 15-passenger vans, minibuses, and stretch limousines. Affiliated Transportation delivers clients to fixed-base operators (FBOs), meetings, and airport runs including making airport crew transfers for six airlines.

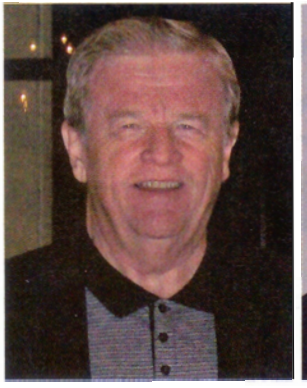
In 2007, Larry Roberson, managing partner, decided to give the Networkfleet product a test run. During that year, gasoline prices were rising, and the company needed to closely monitor vehicle idle time, speed, and fuel consumption.

Networkfleet's Fleet Map system can carefully track fleet vehicles and send out alerts when something potentially harmful happens. "An onboard sensor communicated with the Networkfleet system, which determined there was a transmission problem," Roberson says. "We had the driver shut down the car."

Besides avoiding harrowing, costly

maintenance problems. Affiliated dispatchers use the system at all times to track driver behavior, such as spotting chauffeurs who sit idle when they shouldn't be. During the winter, this can mean chauffeurs sit in the car with the heater on full blast when they can be inside a building staying warm.

Since implementing the Networkfleet, fleet idle time has dropped off 18 percent to 22 percent, depending on the vehicle. Vehicle speed has been dropped down to 55 miles per hour to comply with state law. "If a chauffeur is idling too long or speeding, we'll discuss it with him in person," Roberson says. "Most of them come to me before I go to them, and explain the reasons for doing what they did. I ask them if they would do this in their own vehicle."



**■ Tracking idle time and vehicle speed has allowed Affiliated Transportation to resolve driver behavior problems. "I ask them if they would do this in their own vehicle," says Larry Roberson (left), managing partner.**

**■ "The federal government only mandated that engine lights come on because of emission problems," says Craig Whitney (right), vice president of marketing for the San Diego-based Networkfleet. Fleet operators need to receive all the necessary data from the onboard diagnostic system.**

Networkfleet works with thousands of fleet operations in the U.S., offering fleet managers a wide range of critical diagnostic information. "The federal government only mandated that engine lights come on because of emission problems," says Craig Whitney, vice president of marketing for the San Diego-based company. The Networkfleet system was designed to track all the data from the vehicle's OBD-II system, and alerts operators exactly when they need to know. "We're able to send e-mail alerts out to clients," he says.

The technology supplier started out about 10 years ago, and until recently was called Networkcar. As Networkfleet moved away from consumer retail business to take on more fleet clients, it needed a larger headquarters, which it got in October 2008. That created an ideal time to adjust the corporate brand name. "It was a good time to change," Whitney says. LCT