CITY TECH, NAVY PIER, AND PARTNERS IMPLEMENT NEW TOOLS TO IMPROVE VISITOR EXPERIENCE DURING COVID AND BEYOND

After a busy summer and an uncertain year, city residents and visitors are excited to return to destinations for fun while also bringing raised expectations and cautious optimism for what it means to be in the public realm. Complex facilities such as attractions, museums, and convention centers have long prioritized safety, but now capacity management, proactive communication, and guest navigation are more critical than ever to ensure that each experience is a great one.

In March 2021, City Tech announced a new partnership with NTT, SDI Presence, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM), Intel, and Chicago's Navy Pier to develop new capacity management and visitor experience solutions for shared urban spaces. Typically welcoming nearly 9 million annual guests, these solutions will improve Navy Pier's long-term operations as an iconic space for recreation and commerce while also helping it navigate quickly shifting COVID-related capacity limits and public health and safety concerns.

By bringing together new capacity intelligence sensors with Navy Pier's robust existing sensor network and data systems, the team increased the accuracy of real-time capacity and overall attendance counts at Navy Pier. Optical sensors and technology from Axis Communications and Anixter allowed NTT Smart Solutions to integrate, analyze, and model collected data to develop advanced trip planning tools and an occupancy dashboard that provides predicted and real-time capacity in different zones throughout the Pier. SDI Presence then integrated these solutions into Navy Pier's existing network and physical infrastructure. SOM also identified creative and flexible opportunities to improve operations through design and wayfinding recommendations, such as projectors and digital screens with responsive messaging to improve pedestrian flow and on-site wayfinding. Throughout the project, Intel lent its expertise on edge compute and data privacy to inform the overall solution.

Together, these tools provided new and more nuanced insights into how guests move through Navy Pier's multiple spaces and attractions. In addition, changes in overcrowding conditions can trigger responses in the physical space, such as communicating urgent messages through digital signage and projects, or staff encouraging social distancing, redirecting guests to other attractions at Navy Pier, and proposing flexible itineraries of alternate activities for guests using trip planning tools. Using these solutions, Navy Pier can more quickly respond to current and projected overcrowding in specific areas.

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"We are always looking for new, innovative ways to proactively meet the needs of our guests and provide a memorable experience at Navy Pier," said Mark Thompson, Vice President of Data, Analytics & Strategic Marketing at Navy Pier. "By more seamlessly managing the space, Navy Pier staff can continue to prioritize health and safety to allow visitors to focus more on making the most of their dining, fun, shopping, and cultural experiences at Navy Pier. We are excited to carry these learnings forward into the fall and winter."

Understanding how people plan their trips and navigate to and throughout the Pier was crucial for the team to develop the best solutions for visitors. In June 2021, City Tech surveyed members of its Civic User Testing group (CUTgroup), a 1,600+ resident engagement program that invites individuals to contribute to emerging technology while providing public, private, and social sector partners with feedback to improve product design and deployment. Residents helped the solution team understand visitors' attitudes towards returning to Navy Pier, what they consider a smooth and safe experience moving through and post-COVID, and how trip planning tools and physical design changes could support their experience. City Tech incorporated these survey results into the solution team's final outputs, including recommendations for the Pier improve overall wayfinding as well as share accessible information about crowding and mitigation measures.

Although managing capacity brought on new meaning during the pandemic, the need has been present long before – and will continue to be long after – COVID-19. As guests from all over the Chicago area and beyond reenter the public realm, they can expect a better experience when visiting these spaces. Whether behind-the-scenes occupancy counting or interactive navigation tools, new solutions can help attractions such as Navy Pier put visitors' enjoyment and safety first while also increasing their resiliency long-term.

 To learn more about this collaboration, visit www.CityTech.org/Capacity-Management.

About City Tech Collaborative
City Tech Collaborative (City Tech) is an urban solutions accelerator that tackles problems too big for any single sector or organization to solve alone. City Tech's work uses IoT sensing networks, advanced analytics, and urban design to create scalable, market ready solutions. Current initiatives address mobility, healthy cities, connected infrastructure, and emerging growth opportunities. City Tech was born and raised in Chicago, and every city is a potential partner. Visit www.CityTech.org for more information and follow us on Twitter and LinkedIn.

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