

BROADBAND BREAKFAST

Technology Behind Google and Apple's Protocol is Insufficient for Contact Tracing, But Preserves Users' Privacy

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Google and Apple are rarely criticized for not collecting enough data on users, but under the state of emergency COVID-19 has brought about, this is no longer the case, said panelists at a webinar hosted Thursday by the Cato Institute.

Because users' location data could help reduce the spread of coronavirus, there currently exists a tradeoff between privacy and public health.

The technology utilized by the app has sparked debates between healthcare officials, media experts, and the public. In an attempt to reduce public anxieties, and increase app adoption, Apple and Google banned the use of location tracking on their coronavirus-tracing technology, as GPS based solutions "can be centrally stored and used against you," noted **Harper Reed**, senior fellow at the Annenberg Innovation Lab.

While healthcare officials have pleaded for these companies to allow them to utilize more private and accurate GPS location data, the app protects user privacy by instead utilizing low-energy Bluetooth antennas in smartphones, which only log data when people come into contact for short periods of time.

Panelists argued that building a system that preserves privacy is crucial, and that the companies chose the correct route.

It is not yet clear which tracking technology the public would be more comfortable with. Reed argued that the public may be more comfortable with GPS tracking, as many are already familiar with it.

Furthermore, without the useful location data that would allow for more accurate contact tracing, healthcare officials believe that Apple and Google's protocol will be of little use.

But while digital contact tracing will not replace shoe leather contact tracing anytime soon, panelists agreed it can supplement other solutions to help alleviate problems in an already overwhelmed healthcare sector.

