



## OpenbayConnect will diagnose car problems, schedule repairs automatically

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Openbay could message you on your smartphone, and tell you to take your car in for service.  
PHOTO BY GM

### PRIVACY QUESTIONS STILL NEED TO BE ANSWERED

Among the flurry of debuts at the recent [New York International Auto Show](#) was the launch of a new telematics-based service which may illustrate the future of automotive maintenance -- a future that raises questions.

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Openbay, a Boston-based startup that already hosts an online marketplace for auto repair, announced it will roll out a limited offering of its OpenbayConnect service by May. OpenbayConnect, the company explains, "leverages connected-car technology to remotely diagnose automotive vehicle problems and deliver competitive repair quotes to consumers from local mechanics."

Users plug an external device supplied free of charge (and owned) by the company into their vehicles' OBD-II port. The device wirelessly sends vehicle condition data back to Openbay daily. In the event that error codes are read, an alert is sent to users' phones via an OpenbayConnect app or online via email.

Approved service providers also are alerted via the Openbay platform, receiving the car's vehicle identification number, model/make, owner, location and error codes. Service providers use the info to send an offer to complete the service, along with a binding price. The user then selects a shop and schedules an appointment. After the agreed-upon repair or maintenance is performed, Openbay automatically processes payment via credit card or Apple Pay.

Openbay CEO Rob Infantino says the service is pointed at a potentially large category of customers with little experience managing car maintenance and little technical understanding of vehicles. For now, OpenbayConnect will transmit data using the plug-in OBD device, but in the future, data transmission may be embedded in vehicles and broadcast across the emerging V2V network. Infantino says Openbay will work on agreements with OEMs but there are signs -- including a NYIAS announcement of new telematic services from Nissan/Sirius XM -- that the manufacturers will offer essentially similar services themselves.



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Openbay service providers include franchise dealerships and mobile mechanics, but are largely independent repair shops. The company will derive revenue from collecting 10 percent of the invoiced repair from shops with services are booked through OpenbayConnect. In the future, it may charge consumers for use of its wireless devices and platform. It's a familiar data aggregation business model, but a new wrinkle in the auto industry, Infantino acknowledges.

"I think there's going to be a lot of triangulation going on, too," he said. "It's not just the trouble codes we'll look at. How fast was the car going when the alert was triggered? What were the conditions of some of the fluid levels or their temperatures - all kinds of things."

The possibilities raise all kinds of questions: privacy, security, liability.

Will Openbay resell the data it gathers to insurers, OEMs, marketing firms/advertisers, municipalities, DMVs or utilities? "No," says Infantino. Nor will Openbay share the data with its investor, Google Ventures. It's a laudable stance but there is revenue in data and Openbay, like others, will face pressure to sell/share it.

How secure are Openbay's OBD wireless devices? Is there a path to a vehicle's CANbus (brain) through these or via its

potentially Bluetooth-linked smartphone app? The devices can be shared between several vehicles, increasing their exposure to exploits. Though we don't expect him to be an expert, Infantino could not provide convincing assurances. Openbay has likely done its homework, but data transmission is subject to all the threats automakers and others now face.

Data sharing and transmission raise liability questions for Openbay and for its service providers. For example, can diagnostic codes reliably indicate what repairs must be made, and thus pricing information and repair warranties? Openbay's CEO rightly points out that pattern recognition data that better correlates OBD errors with known fixes than ever before. It may be good enough to obviate the need for in-facility diagnostics charges, which can exceed \$150.

However, Infantino admits, "Our experience is that they'll run their hand-held scanner again to validate the trouble codes that were presented to them."



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We called two independent repair shops for their take. Both said they would theoretically perform repairs based solely on remote diagnostics, provided their customers agreed to waive repair warranty and liability privileges. However, both explained that when given the option, the majority of customers authorize in-facility diagnostics. If this proves routine, users may still expect to be charged for diagnostics. Logic would suggest that Openbay's 10-percent cut may be passed on to consumers as well.

Infantino stresses, "We want to empower the user with information to let them make the decisions that they need to make to drive a safe car." And we have no reason to doubt him. Still, this brave new world raises more questions than we can cover here.

Consider one further: When V2V arrives and cars communicate with each other, networked things and authorities, what will the appetite for telematic condition/maintenance be? If your car has warped brake rotors, should it be allowed to join the connected fleet on the road? The rollout of services like OpenbayConnect heralds the possibility that somebody, somewhere may decide it stays in the driveway.

*By Eric Tegler*

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