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SOLUTIONS FOR STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN THE INFORMATION AGE

20 YEARS

VOL20 ISSUE08

AUGUST 2007

inside:

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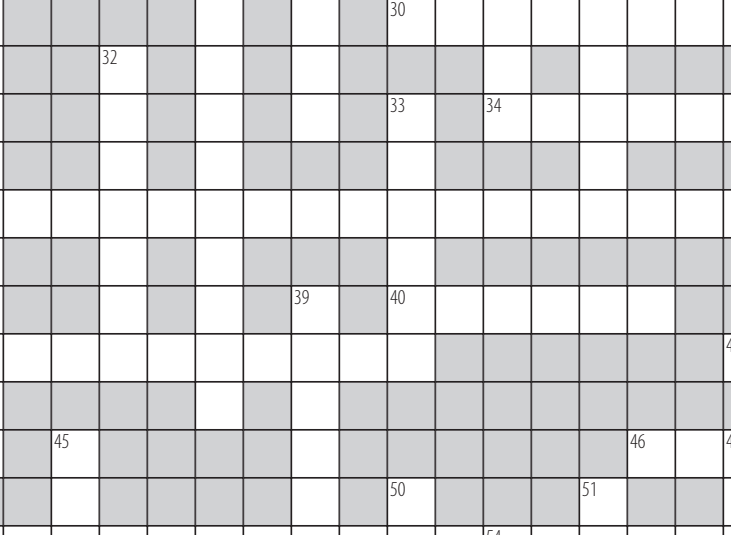
PAGE 20



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ACROSS

1 Coding characters as numbers
4 Data holder
7 Keyboard shortcut part (two words)
9 Gateway's 2007 Technology Business Research customer satisfaction ranking[2]
14 Electronic message center (two words)
15 Association for computer standards
17 First responders like the Gateway E-155C Thin and Light Convertible Notebook featuring ____ Centrino Duo processor technology[3]
18 Computer instructions or data
21 Folder
22 Cursor mover
24 Retrieve internal storage (two words)
26 The Gateway® 9722 rackmount ____ won the Best of FOSE 2007
28 Dot
30 Program instructions
31 Complex Instruction Set Computer
34 The ____ line of Gateway computers provides enterprise-class performance for local governments (one hyphenated word)
35 UNIX system
36 Creating HD's physical format structure (three words)
38 Information unit
40 Message board topic
41 ROM (three words)
42 Old measure of speed
43 Western State Contract Alliance
46 Structured Query Language
48 Practical extraction and report language
49 Widescreen Gateway® displays offer a better ____ in any command center
52 Do it to reinstall the OS (three words)
55 IP (two words)
56 Part of a URL
59 Act
62 Ctrl (two words)
63 Programming data structure
64 Like a procedure
65 Start of www.gateway.com/gov
67 LAN architecture
68 Gateway technology is available on most ____ contracts
69 Application
70 It houses warnings (two words)
71 Retrieval speed (two words)

DOWN

2 All-text display mode provided in terminal window (two words)
3 Device identifier (two words)
5 Time to locate particular data
6 Commands and menus (two words)
7 Common Business Oriented Lang.
8 Info cache
10 ECC (three words)
11 Temporary storage area
12 Pixel is an abbreviation for (two words)
13 Plug-in spot
16 Simplest programming language
19 Programming type (two words)
20 In-box contents
23 DRV extension (two words)
25 Putting jobs in a buffer
27 Time to complete (two words)
29 Control ____
32 Offers U.S.- based phone tech support to state and local departments and agencies[1]
33 Odd or even
37 Multi-user OS
38 Data transfer rate
39 Translates source code to object code
44 Category of objects
45 OOP feature
47 Logical ordering of data (two words)
50 TCP/IP computer
51 Very specific program
53 High-level language program
54 State agencies like Gateway® desktops featuring ____ operating systems
57 You get what you see
58 Secret store
60 Operational function or enhancement
61 A lineup of jobs for a computer
66 Kind of drive (two words)

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contents

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features

COVER STORY

20 **Vanishing Act**

More dollars for homeland security and war means less for police amid a rise in violent crime nationwide.

BY JIM McKAY

32 **Fast Track To Nowhere**

Supporters try to connect U.S. cities with high-speed railroads. But is government in the way?

BY CHAD VANDER VEEN

38 **Best of Both Worlds**

Utah's consolidation plan seeks value of centralization without sacrificing flexibility.

BY ANDY OPSAHL

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VOLUME 20 » ISSUE 8

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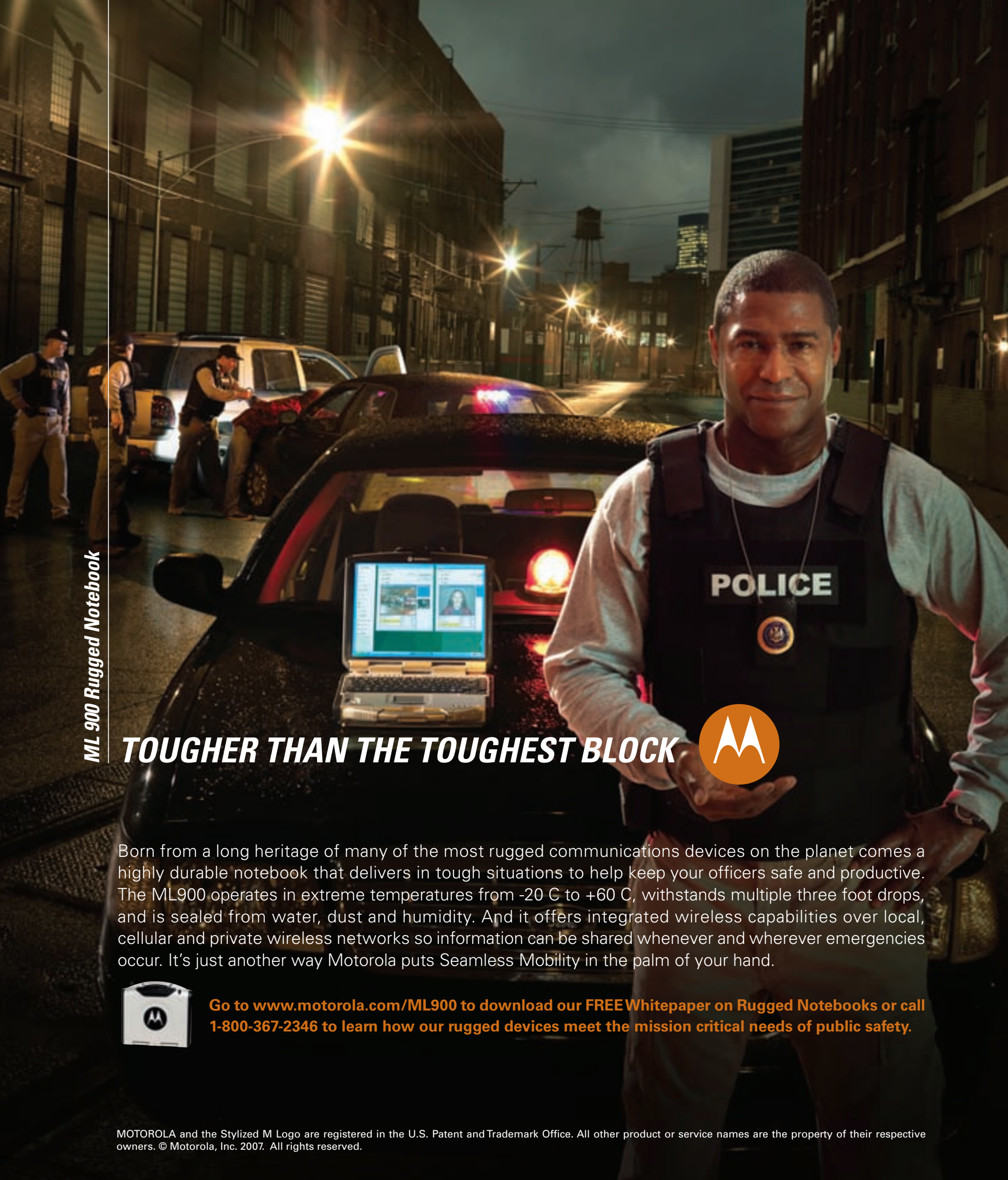

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contents

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departments

42 Texting 911?
911 call centers may soon be equipped to receive text messages and digital photos from callers.

46 GIS to Go
New technologies bring GIS data into the hands of mobile workers looking for real-time geographic information.

50 Neighborhood Watch
The Big Apple brings local officials into the 311 loop.

columns

8 Point of View
The Sacrifice at Home

10 The Big Picture

12 The Last Mile
Am I an Internet Idiot?

14 Letter to the Editor

28 Way Back Machine
Revisiting 20 years of *Government Technology* magazine.

58 signal:noise
Putting People With People

next month:

Positive Reinforcement
As New York City prepares to charge commuters a congestion fee to enter the city, King County, Wash., is taking the opposite approach. The county, home to the city of Seattle, intends to reward drivers for staying off the road during rush hour. Learn how officials hope to cut driving by 12 percent and increase carpooling by 5 percent.

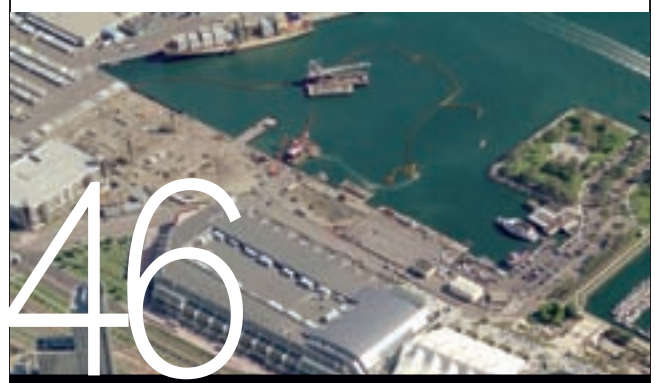
news

16 GT Spectrum
Reports from the IT horizon.

18 Up Close
Walking in Trees

54 Two Cents
The Lenovo 3000 N100 may not win any best-of-show awards for aesthetics, but it won't let you down.

56 Products
Kingston Technology Company, Tangent, Plus Vision Corp., and General Dynamics Itronix.



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The Sacrifice at Home

Raise Your Voice
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One of the many criticisms leveled at the Bush administration's train wreck of a war in Iraq is that the four-year campaign has required little sacrifice from the average American.

Of course, U.S. soldiers and their families bear a huge burden — more than 3,500 U.S. men and women have paid with their lives. But for the rest of us, the war often chugs along under the radar. No draft to relieve bone-tired troops. No new taxes to cover the war's $1 trillion-plus price tag. No problem.

But wait; perhaps that's not quite true.

In this month's cover story, Justice Editor Jim McKay looks at the impact of the Iraq War — and the broader "War on Terror" — on federal funding for state and local law enforcement.

The run-up in federal funding for community policing, which began in the mid-1990s, coincided with a dramatic drop in violent crime throughout the United States. Now reduced funding appears to be a factor in undoing the gains achieved by local police agencies. Murder rates are rising in numerous cities, according to the FBI, as are the numbers of robberies and aggravated assaults.

As McKay's story points out, reduced federal funding for law enforcement probably isn't the only cause of growing crime rates. Demographic and economic factors also play significant roles. But it stands to reason that fewer cops and less crime-fighting technology are part of the problem.

Although law enforcement officials hold some hope for funding improvement in fiscal

Spiraling war costs and an obsession with homeland security since 9/11 put a significant dent in the **two biggest pots of federal money** for local police.

Spiraling war costs and an obsession with homeland security since 9/11 put a significant dent in the two biggest pots of federal money for local police: Community Oriented Policing Services grants and State and Local Law Enforcement Assistance grants. Together, these two funding sources decreased from $4.4 billion in 2001 to $2.5 billion in 2006.

These grants put tens of thousands of new police officers on the streets. Federal grant funding is also instrumental in deploying technology, such as laptop computers in police cruisers, that makes officers more effective.

2008, Bush seems hell-bent on pressing the war in Iraq until the end of his term, leaving the mess for the next president to sort out. Meanwhile, the operation continues to ring up a tab of $300 million per day, according to *The New York Times*.

It's ironic that the Iraq War — and, indeed, the War on Terror itself — may be asking Americans to sacrifice the very thing it was supposed to protect: their safety. GT

STEVE TOWNS
EDITOR

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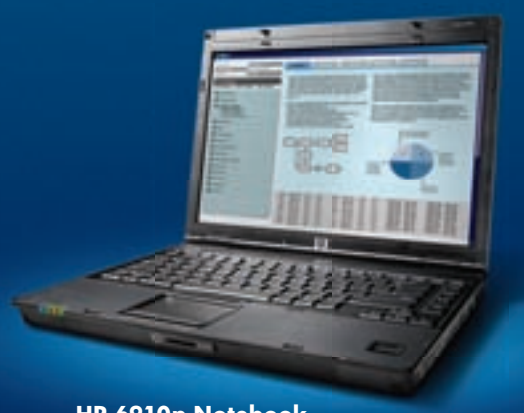

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big picture

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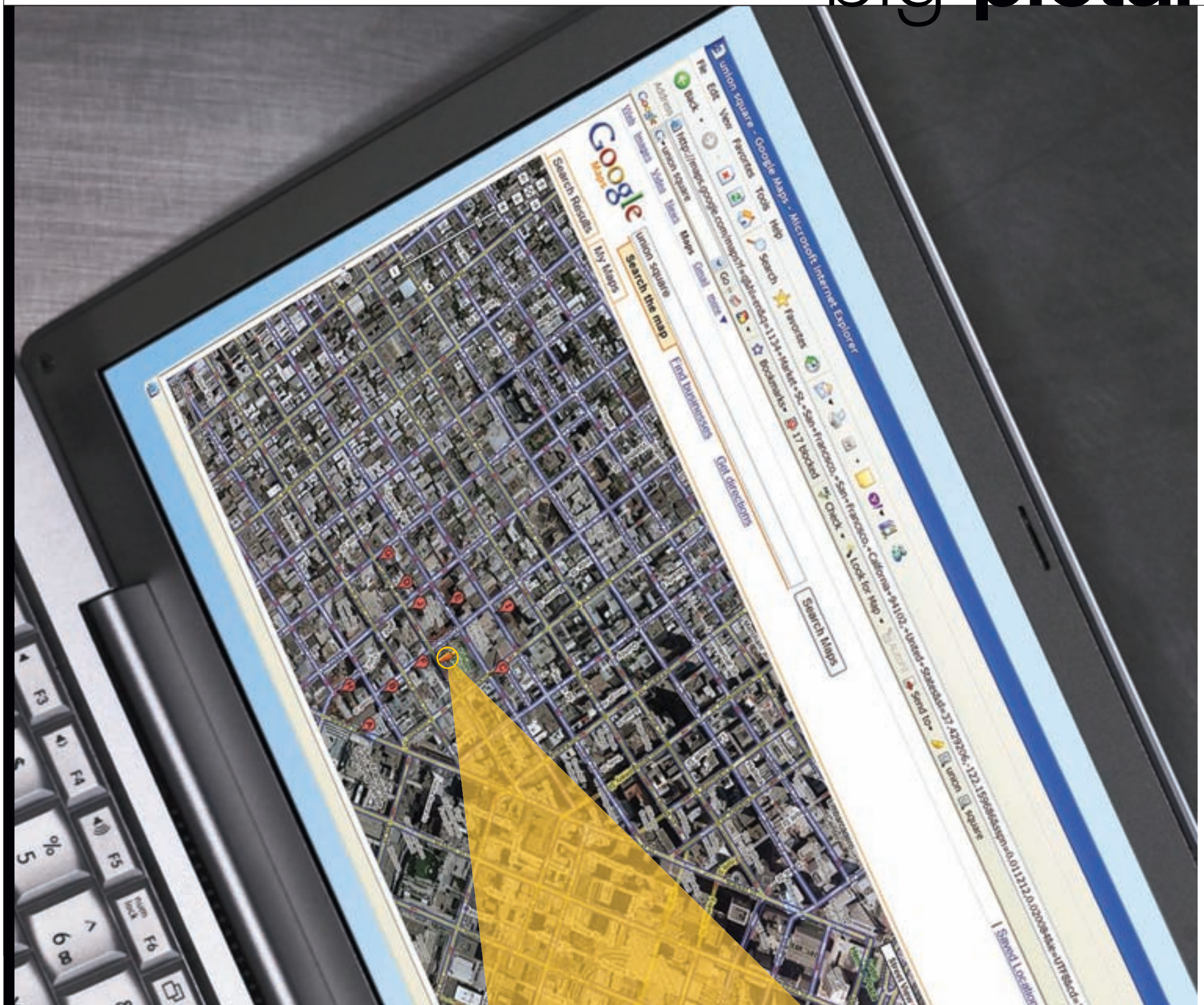

Street View lets users navigate through U.S. streets and zoom in on images. Shown here is a close-up of a woman sitting on a bench at Geary Street, San Francisco.

Candid Camera

Google Maps' new Street View shows 360-degree views of city streets. Some images capture unsuspecting city residents in unflattering situations — a man picking his nose on a street corner, Stanford students sunbathing on campus clad in bikinis — sparking privacy concerns.

Google, however, contends that the imagery reflects what any person can see walking down the street. U.S. law imposes relatively few restrictions on photographing people unless they're in private places, away from public viewing, according to the *Legal Handbook for Photographers: The Rights and Liabilities of Making Images* by Bert P. Krages.

BY CHAD VANDER VEEN
TECHNOLOGY AND POLITICS EDITOR

Am I an Internet Idiot?

Do the Intarwebs make us more stupider? What an amusing irony it would be if the so-called Information Age actually made us less intelligent. Along with the wonders the World Wide Web brings to our homes and offices — and laptops and cell phones and video game consoles and God knows what else — it also provides a forum for raving lunatics to voice their insanity.

One of my favorite Web sites is Digg, the news aggregator populated by news links submitted and voted on by users. The more people like the link, the more prominently it's displayed on Digg's main pages. But the problem is that the very thing that makes Digg great — user-generated content — is what makes me feel so stupid when I read it. Here is a sample of the leading links during the time of my writing: *Bush's Grandfather Directed Bank Who Funded Hitler; Gay Flamingos Adopt a Baby;* and *Woman Drinks 12 Diet Cokes a Day.*

Digg, like many other news-aggregating sites, allows users to also comment on stories. Would you believe 200 people have something to say about a woman who drinks a dozen Diet Cokes? In the offline world, you'd be lucky to find two people who'd care to comment. But online, every person can, and often does, share their two cents. Sometimes you read some really funny, insightful stuff — comments that go on to be Internet memes (temporarily popular Internet phenomena, such as the LOLcats or L337 speak). But more often, Internet commentary is evidence that the globe is full of failing high school students, conspiracy nut jobs and video game fans.

For some reason, the Internet makes people do and say things they would never otherwise do or say. Over at Penny Arcade, a popular webcomic, comic character Jonathan Gabriel once enounced the brutally eloquent Greater Internet Jerkwad* Theory, which states that: Normal Person + Anonymity + Audience = Total Jerkwad*. Yet Web sites like Digg, Fark and Slashdot are getting more popular because user comments — no matter how stupid — are interesting in their own right. So much so, that traditional news outlets are entering the commenting game.

In addition to the detrimental effect anonymity has on normal people, some "Netizens" have a special way of taking part of a story and transforming it into something simultaneously hilarious and utterly moronic. Take the word "Intarwebs" or its relative "Intertubes." Each began life as a play on a quote. The former word came from President Bush's usage of the term "Internets," and the latter was taken from Alaska Sen. Ted Stevens' explanation of the Internet as a "series of tubes." In fact, many Internet users would know exactly what you meant from the word "tubes." For example, if a person were to say, "The tubes are clogged again," he or she would mean Web sites are loading slowly.

> "For some reason, the **Internet makes** people do and say things they would never otherwise **do or say**."

This is all symptomatic of the Internet's uncanny ability to reduce big chunks of very useful information into tiny bits of questionably useful stuff. I just hope these little nuggets of data I glean every day aren't turning me into an Internet idiot. GT

** Less offensive term substituted for original.*

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letters

Off Target

I just read your editorial in the March issue of *Government Technology* on Culver City, Calif.'s concerns about people using its Wi-Fi system to illegally trade copyrighted materials and porn [*The Cost of Free Wi-Fi*]. You thought the city's concerns frivolous and that government should be prepared to let people use their network any way they wish.

Yes, you are alone.

I am, like you, far from an expert in these legal issues. It seems to me, however, based on recent stories in the computer press, that government is held to a different standard in its operations than we hold ourselves.

You are no doubt familiar with the case of a school district back East that was held liable for damages to the parents of a boy who downloaded porn on the school's computer. The court did not blame the parents who did not teach their kid not to do certain things. The court blamed the school district for not having blocking software on the computer, never mind that the blocking software also interfered with the ability of the students to do Internet research.

You are also no doubt familiar with the plight of a teacher back East facing criminal charges for accidentally stumbling on a porn site during a class, and her frantic efforts to close the site only led to the opening of more. *[Editor's note: The teacher was granted a re-trial in early June due to "erroneous" testimony from a computer expert witness presented by state prosecutors, according to news reports.]*

I also think you chose some bad examples.

Of course the RIAA [Recording Industry Association of America] doesn't sue Comcast. If they did, they would be facing an opponent with more money than they have and a phalanx of lawyers who could tie up the suit in court for many years. Better to sue a 10-year-old who downloaded a song from Napster. She didn't have the money to fight.

Government has been held to not be an ISP [Internet service provider] and is forbidden to compete with ISPs, at least in many states. Juries view government as having deep pockets, and I have no doubt that now that Culver City (formerly Swinging Culver City, home of the Meadowbrook Lounge where all the big bands held sway in the late '40s) knows that people are using its Wi-Fi network (note the added element of knowledge) for nasty things, it runs a high risk of being held liable.

Porn sites do hog bandwidth, as the incident of the teacher shows. They disable the "close" and "back" buttons, and attempts to close one site only lead to more sites opening. The only way to get out is to shut down the computer.

ISPs censor content all the time. They censor spam and other junk e-mail and reserve the right to kick people off for using their service for just the purposes that concern Culver City. When government competes in the marketplace, it does so on the same grounds as private individuals.

Why should Culver City not be allowed the same rights as a private ISP? It would only take one adverse judgment against a city to ax all municipal participation in spreading Wi-Fi across the country to all who need it. I believe Culver City was right to take the actions it did. The solution, however, needs to come from the Legislature to enact a statute to protect cities operating Wi-Fi networks from such threats.

Finally, presumably Culver City took its action only after getting the opinion of its city attorney. He must have determined that there was a risk to the city. If the city were confident that there was no risk, I do not believe that it would have taken the actions that it did.

You should stick to the application of technology to government operations, where you are an expert. In my view, you let your own political leanings get the better of you on this one.

This incident would, I believe, make a good article, though, for a future issue. What are the parameters of a city's responsibilities and duties when running municipal Wi-Fi? I should think a full analysis would be most useful.

JOHN WAID,
BERKELEY_MEWS@HOTMAIL.COM

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spectrum

reports from the IT horizon

Tag, You're It

A startup called Dutch Umbrella is selling advertising spots on umbrellas to shopkeepers and restaurateurs in Fairmount, Pa.

Patrons borrow umbrellas from a participating business, then leave them in a collection bin — called a "RainDrop" — at other participating businesses. Each umbrella is identified by a Motorola radio frequency identification (RFID) tag.

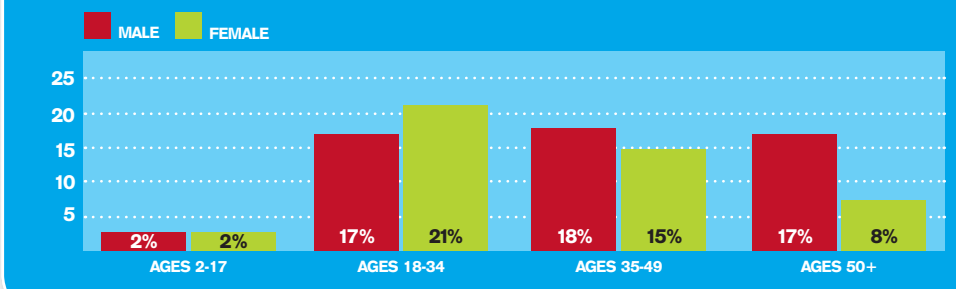
Dutch Umbrella sends employees outfitted with handheld RFID-tag readers to visit businesses and identify each umbrella. This information is entered into a program which computes where the umbrellas travel throughout the city and tracks the circulating umbrellas.

The company also creates printouts from the software showing where merchants' umbrella messages have traveled; data they can then use for marketing intelligence.

— INFORMATIONWEEK.COM

Taking the Lead

Like the United States, the UK's Internet population promises to be increasingly female, according to Nielsen//NetRatings, which surveyed UK computer users by age and gender at both home and work locations.*



*NUMBERS SHOWN AS A PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS

Rapid Growth

By 2012, 90 percent of all broadband wireless deployments worldwide will use WiMAX, and demand for WiMAX and broadband customer premise equipment will rise to $3.7 billion, according to Maravedis Inc.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SEGWAY

Segway Speed Chase

Long Beach, N.Y., police made its first Segway-assisted arrest, apprehending three juvenile car thieves in early June after an officer pursued them on his two-wheeled, battery-powered Segway.

At a top speed of 12.5 mph, the Segway won't help in a car chase, but its height allowed Officer Jose Miguez to keep the vehicle in sight for two blocks until the teens ditched the moving car to escape moments before it cleared a curb and struck a utility pole.

After the car crashed, Miguez said, he caught the 13-year-old driver, who identified his two companions. Long Beach police got two Segways in early May to patrol the city's 2.2-mile-long boardwalk during the summer beach season. — *Newsday*

Tobacco Stinks

In 2015, tobacco is projected to kill 50 percent more people than HIV/AIDS, and will be responsible for 10 percent of all deaths, according to the World Health Organization's World Health Statistics 2007 report.

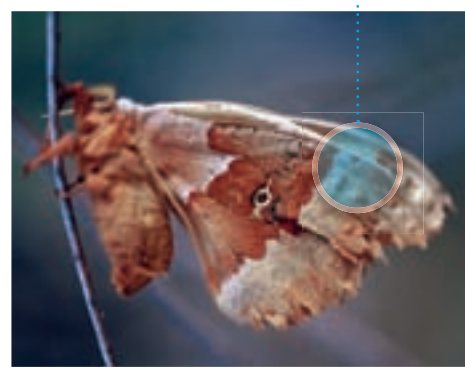
Covert Critters

At some point in the near future, a moth will take flight in the hills of northern Pakistan toward a suspected terrorist training camp. But this is no ordinary moth.

The insect will bear an implanted computer chip, which will allow the moth's entire nervous system to be controlled remotely. The moth will land in a camp without arousing suspicion, all the while beaming video and other information back to its masters via what its developers call a "reliable tissue-machine interface."

The creation of creatures whose flesh grows around computer parts — more popularly known as "cyborgs" — is described as one of the most ambitious robotics projects ever conceived by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, the research and development arm of the U.S. Department of Defense.

— TIMESONLINE.COM



Send spectrum ideas to associate editor **Shane Peterson** <speterson@govtech.com>

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Up Close

walking in trees

A research team observing wild orangutans in Sumatra, Indonesia, found that walking on two legs may have originated in ancient, tree-dwelling apes, rather than in more recent human ancestors who lived on land, as current theory suggests.

Walking upright, or bipedalism, has long been considered a defining feature of humans and our closest ancestors. One of the most popular explanations, the "savannah hypothesis," suggests that chimps, gorillas and human ancestors descended from tree-swinging primates and began walking on the ground on all fours.

Over time, this four-legged gait would have evolved into the "knuckle-walking" that chimps and gorillas still use today, and then into upright, two-legged walking in humans.

Paleontologists have conventionally used signs of bipedalism as key criteria for distinguishing early human fossils from those of other apes. But this distinction is complicated by recent fossil evidence that some early humans, including Lucy, lived in woodland environments, while even earlier forms, such as Millennium Man, might have lived in the forest canopy and moved on two legs.

To collect the data, Susannah Thorpe of the University of Birmingham, UK, spent a year living in the Sumatran rainforest, recording virtually every move the orangutans made. She and her colleagues then used these observations to test the hypothesis that bipedalism would have benefited our tree-dwelling ape ancestors.

— American Association for the Advancement of Science

learning to walk

ILLUSTRATION BY TOM McKEITH

Because tree-dwelling ape ancestors were probably fruit-eaters, as orangutans are, they needed a way to navigate the thin, flexible branches at the tree's periphery, where fruit typically is. Moving on two legs and using their arms primarily for balance, or "hand-assisted bipedalism," may have helped them travel on these branches. The researchers found that today's orangutans are more likely to use hand-assisted bipedalism when on the thinnest branches, and when bipedal, tend to grip multiple branches with their long toes.

On medium-sized branches, modern orangutans use their arms more to support their weight, changing their moving style to incorporate hanging. They only tend to walk on all fours when navigating the largest branches. Hand-assisted bipedalism may have allowed ape ancestors to grip multiple branches with their toes and distribute their center of gravity more effectively, while keeping one or both of their long arms free to reach for fruits and other supports.

Orangutans also keep their legs straight while standing on bending branches, the researchers reported. The exact benefit of the straight legs is still unclear, but when humans run on springy surfaces, we also keep our weight-bearing legs relatively straight, so this may have an energy-related advantage.

Somewhere toward the end of the Miocene Epoch — 24 million to 5 million years ago — climate in East and Central Africa became alternately wetter and drier, and the rainforest grew increasingly patchy. Apes living in the forest canopy would have begun to encounter gaps between trees that they could not cross at the canopy level. It's suggested that early human ancestors responded to this by abandoning the high canopy for the forest floor, where they remained bipedal and began eating food from the ground or smaller trees.

VANISHING

ACT

MORE DOLLARS FOR HOMELAND SECURITY AND WAR MEANS LESS FOR POLICE AMID A RISE IN VIOLENT CRIME NATIONWIDE.

BY JIM McKAY | JUSTICE EDITOR

COMMUNITY POLICING was born in the 1990s when a surge in the national crime rate prompted the Clinton administration to flood the states with Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) grants that put cops on the streets and in many cases, laptops in their cars.

The original COPS grants resulted from the COPS bill in 1994, which aimed to put 100,000 new police in the communities where they could forge relationships and develop trust among the populace. Later COPS MORE (Making Officer Redeployment Effective) grants allowed police to use the money for crime-fighting technology.

Perhaps coincidentally, the COPS grants paralleled a dramatic drop in crime throughout the '90s. But after 9/11, much of that money dried up or was shifted for homeland purposes. Again perhaps coincidentally, the crime rate took an upward turn for the worse nationally in what one police chief called an epidemic of violence.

With resources now going to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan at a clip of $10 billion a month, $1 billion of "get Osama bin Laden money" going to Pakistan every year, as well as $34 billion (fiscal 2006) going to the states for homeland security — though that pie is also shrinking — police say they're getting squeezed, and it's affecting how they cope with the spike in violent crime.

"The COPS Office over the years was a great source of leveraging technology, but over the last six or seven years, it's pretty well been gutted, and most of the funding that was going to police has been redirected to homeland security or the war effort," said Colorado Springs, Colo., Police Chief Richard Myers. "That left us high and dry, and that's why we have fewer cops on the streets than we did pre-9/11."

White House officials didn't return phone calls requesting a response.

In many midsize cities, police are down in numbers, and cops say they've turned from community-oriented police to "in your apartment police" as they struggle just to get from call to call. Many departments say they've lost their ability to use intelligence or focus on preventive policing because they're mired in answering calls.

"At any given time, darn near every cruiser in an urban jurisdiction may be tied up with social-related, crime-related problems," said Springfield, Mass., Police Commissioner Edward Flynn. "We work hard to create a preventive policing capacity. But we really end up spending an awful lot of overtime because if we just staff up to meet the needs of our calls for service, we don't have sufficient organizational slack to provide a stable presence in public spaces, and people need to see cops in public."

Community Involvement

In the early 1990s, with crime rates on the rise, police began getting out of their cars for face-to-face communication with residents. By the time COPS was rolled out in 1994, crime rates had begun to dip in some areas, and community policing garnered much of the accolades. The COPS grants helped further the cause and put anywhere from 60,000 to 90,000 new cops on the streets (depending on whose numbers you use) to forge a bond with communities and gang up on the bad guys.

The COPS grants required that all new officers took to the streets to spend time with the local citizenry. Crime rates continued to dip, and at remarkable levels — from 1994 to 2000 violent crime declined by 46 percent nationally.

But after 9/11, the Bush administration focused on homeland security, and direct funding to law enforcement took a detour to homeland security causes. Some funding still winds up with law enforcement agencies, but

ILLUSTRATION BY TOM McKEITH

it's earmarked specifically for homeland security, according to Flynn.

"What those of us in law enforcement noticed in the years after the 9/11 attacks — particularly when the congressional funding started making its way to local government via the states in 2003 — was that at the same time funding was expanding dramatically in some cases for homeland security equipment and programs, at the same rate or even more rapid rate, funding for criminal justice generally, and law enforcement specifically, was dramatically being scaled back," he said.

Police are in a position to provide homeland security intelligence, Flynn continued, but they're so tied up with their core responsibilities that they can't develop relationships with the community.

"By removing our ability to consistently interact with them to buy bunkers or explosion detection vehicles — or whatever the hell — you're removing from us our ability to develop street-level intelligence about ongoing suspicious conditions," he said. "The same people who want to tell us about drug dealers will tell us about terrorists if they trusted us and knew us.

"Our position is the core missions of police and fire are the same regardless of the cause," he continued. "The police respond to threats, try to prevent threats through the development of intelligence, and they have to have both a tactical and strategic capability. Fire departments deal with HAZMAT incidents and fires and explosions. Who the hell cares who did it?"

Crime Fact:
In cities with populations of 25,000 to 50,000, the violent crime rate rose by more than 8 percent from 2004 through the first six months of 2006. In towns with populations between 10,000 and 25,000, the homicide rate went up more than 6.5 percent over the same period.

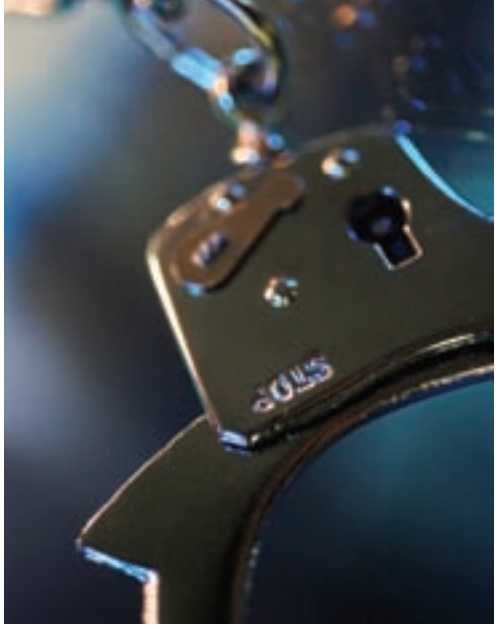
Source: International Association of Chiefs of Police

Billions in 9/11 Grants Unspent

A *USA Today* report in June said that nearly one-third of homeland security grants doled out to states since 9/11 remained unspent.

The report said that nearly $5 billion of the $16.04 billion approved by Congress from 2002 to 2007 remained in federal coffers, which suggests to the Bush administration that the federal government is dishing out money faster than states can spend.

Reasons for the backlog vary, according to the report and in some cases equipment has been back-ordered, in other cases money has been allotted for multiyear projects, such as upgrading communications systems. Some states said some of the money is unspent because communities can't come up with the matching funds required to spend the federal money.



The Bush administration submits a yearly budget that hacks away at COPS funding. For the most part, Congress restored some of that funding before those budgets became law, but the COPS hiring grants and MORE grants disappeared altogether. Overall, COPS grants and State and Local Law Enforcement Assistance grants, the two main pots of federal justice money, fell from $4.4 billion in 2001 to $2.5 billion in 2006. As of May 2007, the fiscal 2007 justice funding was still up in the air.

Congress has fought to keep justice funding levels near what they were for 2006, fending off the administration's attempt to cut back again.

"The question is will the money be there," said Gary Cooper, vice president of Research and Consulting for CJIS GROUP. "We see authorizing bills, but as far as money is concerned, it's just smoke and mirrors. Until you appropriate it, it doesn't mean anything."

Alarming Trends

Along the way, violent crime began to rise again.

Between 2004 and mid-2006, the murder rate reached a 20-year high in Cincinnati and a 16-year high in Fairfax County, Va., according to the FBI's Uniform Crime Report (UCR). In Boston; Richmond, Calif.; Virginia Beach, Va.; and Springfield, Mass., the murder rate was at a 10-year high.

In 2005, robbery and aggravated assault increased to a 14-year high. In a 2005 National Crime Victimization survey, attempted robbery with injury was up by nearly 36 percent. Even in Seattle, where violent crime is usually low, there was a 25 percent increase in gun crimes. Robbery is also up in many parts of the country, according to a report by the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF).

UCR statistics for 2005 showed arrests of juveniles for robbery increased by more than 11 percent and were deadlier. Youths look for iPods and use a technique called "rat packing," where the robbers use their cell phones to call their mates and coordinate when to swarm on a victim. Particularly alarming to police is the fact that many of the victims were shot without provocation after the robberies, according to the PERF report.

It's the inner cities where gangs are resurging, and the mixture of youth and guns is creating a volatile mix. With a decreasing police presence, the seeds for more violence get planted, police say.

"The problem is when we are not available in public spaces, citizen fear increases, which undermines community confidence in cities and sometimes their economic viability, and that's happening in a lot of midsize cities," Flynn said. "It's less of a factor in a New York or a Chicago than it is in a Springfield or a Rochester, [N.Y.]."

Those larger cities, Flynn said aren't as dependent on federal grants because they can tap more indigenous resources. "The burden really falls heaviest on what I'd call the 'cruiserweight' cities. The cities between 100,000 and 300,000 population are the ones that had the biggest overall spikes in violence over the last five years."

In many of those cities, the attrition rate of officers — through retirement, layoffs and deployment to war — creates an increased burden. Cities such as Minneapolis, Boston and Detroit employ fewer officers than at the beginning of the decade. The Richmond, Calif., Police Department experienced a 25 percent drop in police officers.

Minneapolis, which has been forced to cut 140 officers since boosting the number to 938 in the late '90s, conversely has seen a rise in robberies by about 20 percent. Detroit is down 1,000 officers, and Richmond and Boston — two of the cities with the biggest jump in violent crime — have fewer officers than they did in the '90s.

"We're not being alarmists, but we do believe it's prudent to intervene before one enters a crisis, not after the crisis has occurred," Flynn said, adding the rising trend in violent crime is undeniable. "I'm not going to attribute the crime to law enforcement capacity directly, but I will say that again, nationwide there has been a significant decrease in the number of officers working since the functional ending of the COPS program and with the resultant or coincidental fiscal difficulties of states and cities."

Nobody is willing to say police can prevent rising crime rates, but they do say spending dwindling resources rushing from call to call instead of community policing detracts from the ability to use intelligence from the community and focus on high-priority areas. It also undermines the community's feeling of safety and trust.

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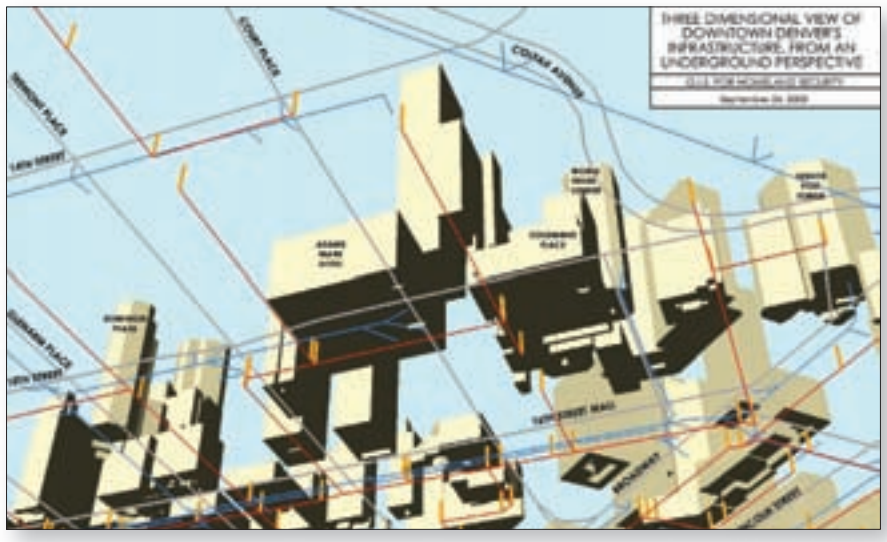

3D view of downtown Denver's infrastructure from an underground perspective

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At a Glance
When peering into the future of law enforcement, police see a dramatic increase in the use of technology that could increase their effectiveness, like this virtual hallucination device.

In Colorado Springs, Myers said, the situation is critical. "We are increasingly reaching what we call the saturation point, which is when you make a call for service and we don't have one free officer citywide to respond to that call."

Myers' staff recently met to discuss and identify what police activities bring the greatest value to the community and which ones can be eliminated. They may decide to go completely to "cold reporting status" for traffic accidents as they do at busy times of day, meaning that unless there's an injury or drunk driver involved, the police won't come.

Less Money, Less Flexibility

Everyone acknowledges a combination of factors led to the lowered crime rate of the '90s, including a strong economy, a decrease in crack cocaine use and a smaller population of young people. Currently there are several factors boosting the surge in crime, such as the resurgence in methamphetamine use and baby boomers' children at an age when they're most likely to commit crimes.

"It's complicated," said Oklahoma City Police Chief Bill Citty. "Talk to any chief and if they say they have control of crime, they're not being honest. You don't, because there are so many social factors involved."

Oklahoma City didn't accept COPS hiring grants because of the stipulation that officers hired had to be kept for at least a year after the grants ran out, and the city didn't think it could match the funds. "I think a lot of communities had that problem," Citty said. "They took advantage of the COPS grants and all of a sudden, they had to fund it themselves."

Yet, as critics of the COPS hiring program quickly point out, Oklahoma City, too, experienced a drop in crime in the '90s, proving that with or without the extra cops, most cities saw a hiatus in criminal activity anyway. Another criticism of the COPS hiring program was that some of the money was misspent, and that many open positions were never filled. Federal audits have actually proven as much.

Oklahoma City, however, tapped other justice block grants, such as Justice Assistance Grants, which were used to buy technology and for overtime to staff high-priority areas. "The block grant money was huge," Citty said. "We went from having $1 million to spend before 9/11 to about $300,000 now. That's a big hit for us."

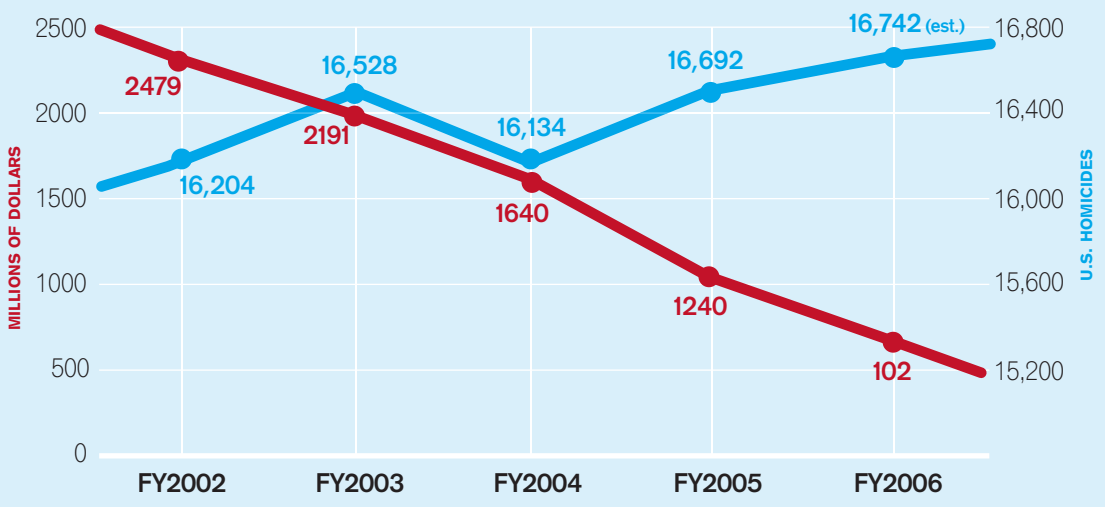
Now there's less money for everyone, and a lot of it is earmarked for homeland security. "We had much more discretion with that [Justice Assistance Grants] funding," Citty said. "We bought computers with it, used it for information systems, our fingerprint systems, overtime programs in high-crime areas and entertainment districts where we really needed additional manpower."

"The grant money that came in from homeland security was extraordinarily restrictive, even for training," said Flynn, who served for more than three years as Gov. Mitt Romney's secretary of public safety and administered homeland security and criminal justice grant money during that time. "You might want to do sniper training but no — you had to prove you were doing terrorist-related sniper training. Fire departments might have wanted to do HAZMAT training, but if they didn't link it to a nexus with terrorism, they wouldn't fund HAZMAT training."

That lack of flexibility may have been a backlash to claims that some of the early homeland security money was misspent. "It's been limited, and that's been compounded by the fact that in some parts of the country, I don't think the grants have been used wisely," Myers said. "The pie has been carved up in so many pieces trying to satisfy dozens and dozens of constituencies that it's turned into more of a Christmas list for local government managers who couldn't get what they wanted out of their normal budgeting procedures. They've leveraged some of those homeland security grants to get — I don't want to call them toys — but operational items that probably should have been a part of the regular operating budget."

As much of the rest of the nation, Oklahoma City is now dealing with a gang problem and an alarming rise in violent crimes involving fatalities. "Last year 35 percent or 40 percent of

Cause and Effect?
This graphic shows the decline in funding for Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) grants and Justice Assistance Grants (JAG), along with the rise in U.S. homicides.



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our homicides had gang members involved," Citty said. "That's high because a couple of years ago we had three, and then last year we had 23. That's a big change."

Citty said there aren't necessarily more gang members, but they are getting more violent, a sentiment other chiefs recently echoed. "We're seeing a lot more gun violence. There are a lot more guns out there, and it's a big issue for us and for most cities."

To address the violence, Citty has to pull officers from other areas. "That's one of those areas where if I had additional funding from our Justice Assistance Grants, I could use that money to get additional people and pay overtime where I need the manpower. It gave us some flexibility."

New Grant Money

There could be some fresh funds from the federal government for fiscal 2008. In May 2007, the House passed the COPS Improvements Act of 2007 (H.R. 1700), which authorizes $1.5 billion annually from fiscal 2008 through fiscal 2013, $350 million of which can be used for technology.

Myers said his department is eligible for grants but would be required, under the act, to match 25 percent of the funding. "We are really struggling with this latest announcement. If we were to seek the full $6 million that we would be eligible for under the grant, I'd have to come up with $1.5 million to match that. I just got marching orders to cut 3 percent of my operating budget for the rest of the year."

Myers said he would love to spend the $6 million on technology. In Colorado Springs, he is operating a department that relies on portable radios. "I don't even have hard-mount radios in the cars. We're working in a portable-only environment, and we're having coverage issues with that and don't have the funds to put car radios in every squad car. It's hard to talk about these technologies and efficiencies we can gain when we're not even meeting our basic technology needs."

Myers sees policing at a crossroads with technology that could dramatically increase the effectiveness of police. "It's been forecast that we're somewhere between 20 and 40 years away from a human interface with chip technology. Somewhere down the road, officers will be able to download mug shots of every wanted person and by looking at the faces recall immediately whether it's a wanted person or not. That's radically going to change how we do business."

There is technology available now that makes life easier for some police forces but to others, it's just a dream. "The issue of when you do a traffic stop and somebody doesn't have their license with an in-car video system and perhaps some fingerprint technology, have that immediately run through a database and search nationally to find out who this person is; that exists, but it's not widely in use by police," Myers said.

Funds for that kind of system are not always available at the local level and technology is getting even less affordable, Myers said.

"The rate of change of technology is occurring exponentially, and the days of being able to spend a whole lot of money on some new technologies and riding that wave for 10 years or until you have to update it, those days are gone," he said. "Technology now requires constant maintenance and updating, and the rate of obsolescence is skyrocketing."

Back in the Community

Part of the funds from H.R. 1700 will allot monies to be spent on school resource officers to help combat gang violence. That's a good first step. Police say communicating with youngsters before they're involved in a shooting doesn't happen enough either in schools or on the streets.

"You can become more efficient with the technology, and we're doing that as far as identifying the issues and trying to be more proactive in addressing those. But you can't get away from perception. People want to be able to see an officer in their area," Citty said.

Part of that is community trust, and that has eroded in the last several years, police say. People in the affected areas are too scared to even call the police, and inner-city youngsters are conditioned not to snitch.

Joe Ryan, chairman of the Department of Criminal Justice at Pace University in New York City and a former New York City police officer, believes police have taken on a "militaristic" approach to policing in the last several years and need to revert to community policing.

"The idea behind the federal government giving money to local police agencies is to promote innovation," Ryan said. "Collecting information about what's in your community is really important. We need to get the officers back in the community and, at the same time, use the information to make them more efficient." GT

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GOVERNMENT TECHNOLOGY'S

WAY BACK MACHINE

Revisiting 20 years of *Government Technology* magazine.

1991

Did you know you could buy a (more or less) handheld GPS device in 1991? The early '90s are fascinating to revisit to see our everyday technologies in their infancy. Facsimile machines, electronic mail, CD-ROM, desktop publishing, 3-D graphics — so many new technologies burst onto the scene.

When reading through *Government Technology* from those formative years, one gets the sense that a lot of people were overwhelmed by the rapid technological evolution that was under way.

It's also interesting to look at the issues we faced back then only to realize we're still dealing with the same things. For example, in January 1991, we took a lengthy look at the benefits of telecommuting. Touting the massive reductions in pollution and traffic congestion, the article was ahead of its time, especially seeing how little has changed in the 16 years since.

BY CHAD VANDER VEEN | TECHNOLOGY AND POLITICS EDITOR

1 Tod Newcombe, now editor of *Public CIO*, wrote a fascinating story detailing the rise of the microcomputer. *Coming to Every Government Desktop: The Microcomputer*, published in February 1991, hinted that the PC would change through the '90s. In an amusing bit of hindsight, Newcombe quoted Berkeley, Calif., City Systems Information Manager Chris Mead, who said the city had "… made a policy decision to standardize on [the] 386 architecture. My feeling is the 386 is going to be a very stable architecture." Pentiums came out two years later.

WAY BACK FACT

In 1991, programmers at the University of Minnesota created the Internet's first widely used search-and-retrieval system. Gopher, named after the university's mascot, simplified the task of finding online information and became the standard tool for Internet research in the early to mid-1990s.

2 In February 1992, we ran a cover story that rightly pointed out the growing crisis of overcrowded highways. The solution, claimed by many interviewed for the story, was high-speed rail. Several such rail systems were supposed to be operating by the end of the decade, including lines in Texas and California.

"The era of the Interstate Highway System is over," Roger Borg of the Federal Highway Administration told us.

(See *Fast Track to Nowhere*, pg. 32 for a look at why this still hasn't happened).

GOVERNMENT TECHNOLOGY

Information Hits the Mean Streets

Telecommunications World

Tennessee Offender Management

INSIDE NASIRE AWARDS PAGE 46

3 After scouring hundreds of pages of old *Government Technology* magazines, a much sought-after prize was finally found in our August 1992 issue — our first mention of "the Internet." It came in a column written by then Editor in Chief Larry Madsen, who used the word when referencing the Information Infrastructure and Technology Act of 1992. In only a few more months, the World Wide Web would be born. Ironically in the very next issue, we ran a story that took an in-depth look at the coming age of (er, soon-to-be-obsolete) government service and information kiosks.

WAY BACK FACT

In 1991, **Boris Yeltsin** became the first popularly elected president in Russian history. Yeltsin, who died in April, left an enigmatic legacy. As president, Yeltsin was both visionary and apathetic, and many would accuse him of corruption during his second term. Well known for having a healthy appetite for alcohol, he was often the target of Russian and international media. With his health failing, Yeltsin left office in 1999, apologizing to the Russian people for failing to bring about many of the reforms he promised.

1993

WAY BACK FACT

September 1993 offered a rare glimmer of hope to a perpetually troubled region of the world. In Oslo, Norway, Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin signed peace accords that promised to finally bring much of the conflict in the Middle East to a close. Many Israelis welcomed the accords, as did Palestinian political organization Fatah. Hope soon faded, however, as the more militant Hamas stepped up attacks on Israel. Meanwhile, Israel retaliated with ever-more restrictive policies toward Palestinians. Today, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is as bad — or worse — than ever.

Finally as this month's look back draws to a close, we remember 1993 as the year the Internet moved from an obscure federal research network to the backbone of the information superhighway.

Just to prove how "with the times" we were, a June 1993 column written by e.Republic CEO Dennis McKenna includes a shout out to Prodigy, one of the earliest Internet service providers. GT

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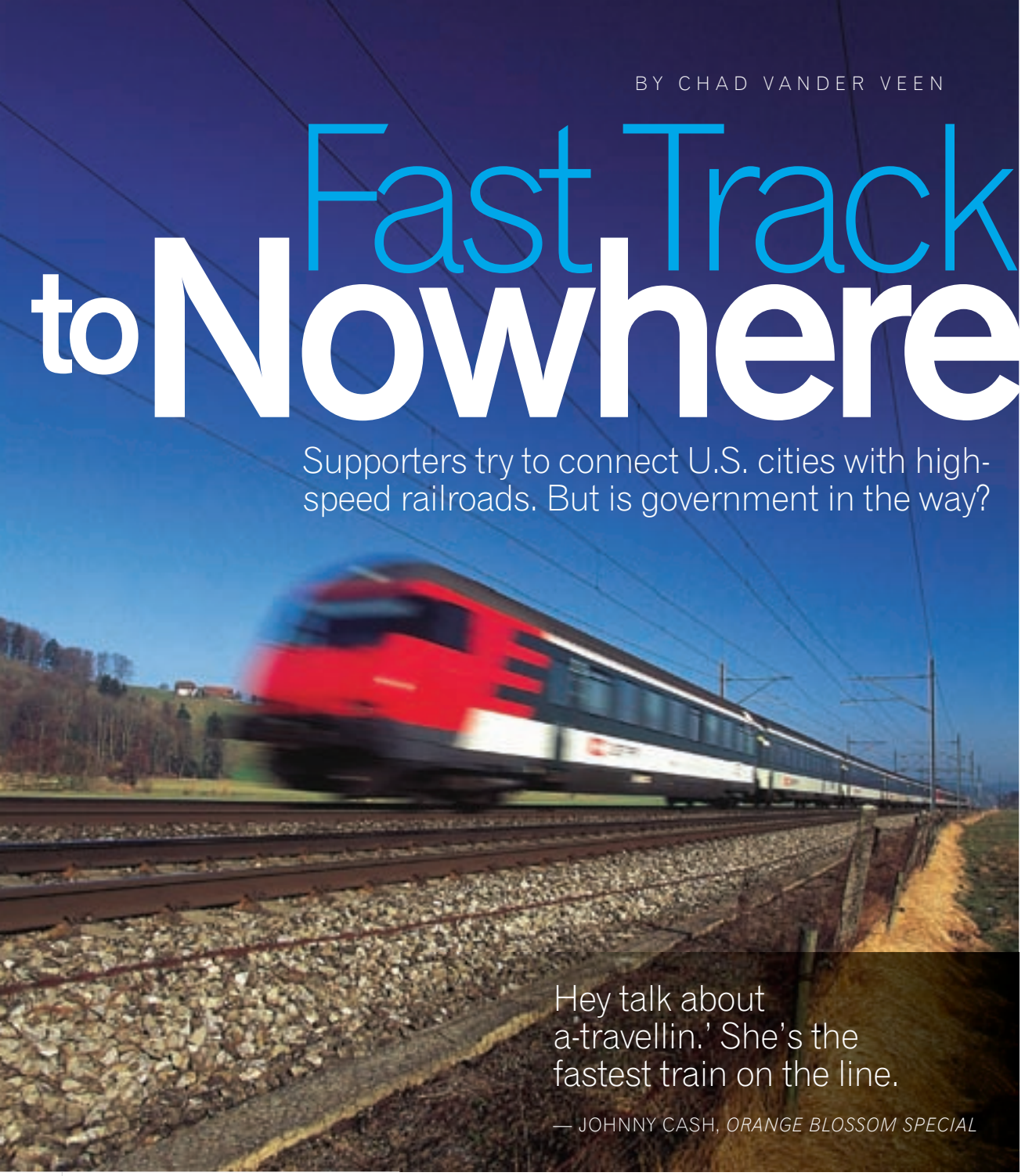
BY CHAD VANDER VEEN

Fast Track to Nowhere

Supporters try to connect U.S. cities with high-speed railroads. But is government in the way?



Hey talk about a-travellin.' She's the fastest train on the line.

— JOHNNY CASH, *ORANGE BLOSSOM SPECIAL*

Paris and Lyon, Tokyo and Osaka, Madrid and Seville, Seoul and Busan — these cities have something in common. They're connected by what many believe is the future of transportation — high-speed rail.

High-speed rail systems whisk passengers hundreds of miles in mere hours by traveling at speeds as high as 357 mph. That record, recently established by the French TGV (*train à grande vitesse* or high-speed train), means the trains can move almost as fast as an airliner. And while most high-speed trains run slightly more slowly — around 200 mph — over the past several decades, they have proven their value, reliability and safety almost everywhere.

Almost everywhere but here, that is.

In China, engineers built the world's first maglev — magnetic levitation — high-speed train. Operational since 2004, the train runs a 19-mile route in Shanghai between Pudong Shanghai International Airport and Shanghai's Lujiazui financial district, and covers the distance in seven minutes.

In Germany, the InterCityExpress — known as ICE — rockets passengers across the country to major cities like Berlin, Hamburg and Munich. The Eurostar Italia ferries riders between cities like Rome, Florence, Naples and Turin at 186 mph. Plus, Italians are in the midst of constructing nearly 400 additional miles of high-speed railway.

In Japan, high-speed trains known as Shinkansen have operated since 1964. The now expansive network of trains, tracks and stations crisscrosses the country and has served more than 6 billion passengers without any major safety issues.

In the United States, high-speed rail systems have yet to leave the station. In fact, they have yet to leave the realm of wishful thinking. Despite high-speed rail's proven global track record, for some reason government — be it federal, state or local — is either unable or unwilling to get onboard.

Railroad Blues

Many high-speed rail proposals exist, especially in large states with far-flung population centers, such as California, Texas and Florida, each of which announced plans for high-speed rail. The trouble is that these plans were created years ago, and not a single mile of track has been laid.

In other regions of closely grouped cities, similar plans now gather dust. There are designs for high-speed trains to service Midwestern cities, such as Chicago, St. Louis and Minneapolis. Likewise, a train connecting Washington, D.C., New York City and Boston has long been in the works.

So far, the best the United States has been able to come up with is the woeful Amtrak system. Slow, expensive and chronically late, the heavily subsidized railway has consistently failed to meet expectations. Amtrak's problems, however, are hardly its own doing. The idea of Amtrak is a noble one — a nationwide passenger railway. Unfortunately Amtrak has been plagued by poor management, budget shortfalls and frequently late arrivals because most of the tracks it runs on are privately owned, which means freight takes priority over people.

There are some bright spots within Amtrak — such as the Capitol Corridor that runs between Sacramento, and San Jose, Calif. There is also Acela, Amtrak's quasi high-speed rail line in the Northeast, running from D.C. to Boston. The train is capable of speeds approaching 150 mph, but due to outdated infrastructure and arcane regional speed restrictions, the train averages around 75 mph. Both lines boast far more ridership than other Amtrak routes, but neither can offer any service approaching true high-speed rail.

Florida seems like the perfect location to build a high-speed rail system. Long and

narrow with many large and distant cities, common sense would seem to dictate that Floridians would like an option besides airlines to quickly travel from Miami to Tallahassee. In fact, in 2000, Florida voters passed an amendment to the state constitution requiring the state to build a high-speed rail system. So why doesn't one exist?

"In 2000, a gentleman by the name of [Charles] Doc Dockery in the Lakeland area, took it upon himself to push for a constitutional amendment [requiring high-speed rail be built] that he was able to put on the ballot with the appropriate number of signatures. It went on the ballot in 2000 and was approved by the Florida voters," said Nazih Haddad, staff director of the Florida High Speed Rail Authority.

With the amendment in the state constitution, the Florida High Speed Rail Authority was created. Soon afterward, the authority went to work, looking first at a route between Tampa and Orlando. The authority believed a phased construction process would yield the best results and identified the Tampa-Orlando line as the optimal route to start with. After receiving two private-sector proposals in 2003, it was determined that the initial route would cost approximately $2.4 billion. All indications pointed toward Florida being the first state to finally build a high-speed rail system.

But then, in early 2004, things began to unravel. The high cost of the rail system and its associated politics led to an effort to repeal the amendment passed just four years earlier. This effort, supported by former then-Gov. Jeb Bush, removed the mandate from the state constitution but left the rail authority in place. The repeal passed with 64 percent approval.

Many have speculated that the repeal amendment was worded to confuse voters who had so recently voted yes on the very same issue.

"Some people will tell you due to some confusion in how the ballot initiative was written, a lot of people who thought they were voting for high-speed rail were actually voting for the repeal of the constitutional amendment," Haddad said, adding that the governor had long opposed the idea of a high-speed rail.

"The basic reasoning is it costs a lot of money — but any major transportation infrastructure costs a lot of money," Haddad explained. "They were afraid the partnership with the private sector was not going to yield the benefits it [promised]."

Once virtually set in stone, the promise of a Florida high-speed rail system has all but died. The rail authority last met in June 2005.

History Repeated

Florida isn't the only story of a high-speed railway that nearly came into existence before being snuffed out by political wrangling. In a previous *Government Technology* article (*Transportation's Plan B*, February 1992) it appeared that high-speed trains would be cropping up everywhere.

"The era of the Interstate Highway System is over," Roger Borg of the Federal Highway Administration was quoted as saying. The story referenced a high-speed rail system in Texas that may have been even closer to being built than the Florida project. The Texas High Speed Rail Authority had, by 1992, awarded a $5 billion contract to a consortium known as Texas TGV. Texas TGV was headed by Morrison Knudsen, known as Washington Group International (recently acquired by URS), and was planning to use French TGV trains to service an area called the Texas Triangle — Houston, San Antonio and Dallas-Fort Worth.

The Texas project was to be built entirely with private-sector money. When our article ran, the train was scheduled to begin operating by 1998. For Texas TGV, all that had to be done was to raise the funds necessary to begin construction. Yet no tracks were ever laid and no trains were ever delivered. Why? Enter Southwest Airlines.

The low-cost, Texas-based airline would have faced significant competition from a high-speed train, and the company invested in a massive lobbying and public relations campaign to discredit high-speed rail in Texas. It succeeded, and the project was scuttled in 1994, according to records of the Texas High Speed Rail Authority in the Texas State Archives.

A decade before that, California took its first stab at building a high-speed rail system. In 1982, Gov. Jerry Brown signed AB 3647, which called for $1.25 billion in tax-exempt bonds to build a Shinkansen-style train that would be managed privately and operated for profit. But by leaving the California Department of Transportation out of the loop, the proposed train drew the ire of many in government. In addition, ridership projections were found to have been largely overstated and connections with mysterious Japanese contractors led to a loss of faith in the project, which quietly died in 1983.

> "The basic reasoning is it cost a lot of money — but any **major transportation infrastructure** costs a lot of money."
>
> **Nazih Haddad,** *staff director, Florida High Speed Rail Authority*

The **Shanghai Maglev Train** is the first commercial high-speed maglev — magnetic levitation transport — line in the world. Construction began in Germany with German technology in March 2001, and public service began on Jan. 1, 2004.

In those days, Mehdi Morshed and his wife Linda were the chief transportation consultants for the California Legislature. Though unable to make high-speed rail a reality in 1983, Mehdi Morshed would get another chance in 1996 when Gov. Gray Davis created the California High-Speed Rail Authority (CHSRA).

Mehdi Morshed was appointed executive director of the authority and has been working once again to bring high-speed rail to the Golden State. But Mehdi Morshed and the CHSRA face yet another crossroads. They reportedly need $103 million to continue paying project engineers and to buy rights of way. Yet Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger is offering only a fraction of the money requested — about enough to keep the lights on — until the CHSRA presents a way to fund the estimated $40 billion it costs to build a high-speed rail network that connects San Diego and Los Angeles to San Francisco and Sacramento.

"We needed the $14 million for this fiscal year to hire the engineers and get mobilized and get ready," Mehdi Morshed explained. "We need $103 million next year to continue that work, and then we'll need somewhere around $200 million the next year."

A bond, which is set to be on the November 2008 ballot, would secure nearly $10 billion to begin construction. This, Mehdi Morshed said, is the cornerstone of building a high-speed rail network that would allow people to move between Northern and Southern California in less than three hours, finally giving residents a long sought-after alternative to expensive flights or the grueling six- to eight-hour drive along Interstate 5. But the bond measure has been postponed twice, and Schwarzenegger is threatening to postpone it again.

Eurostar is a train service connecting the UK with Paris (Gare du Nord), Lille and Brussels (Brussels South). Trains cross the English Channel via the **Channel Tunnel** — also known as the Chunnel.

"We've been funded annually by the Legislature from existing transportation funds. When we go to construction, it's going to require far more money than they can support with the existing budget," Mehdi Morshed said. "The Legislature and the governor proposed the $9.95 billion bond measure. It's been postponed twice for a couple reasons. One, they wanted other priority projects to move forward; two, the high-speed rail project wasn't really ready to go into construction so the bond money wasn't needed at the time. For 2008, it's different. Now we actually need the money because in a couple of years, we'll be ready to go into construction."

> "In a national sense, **California is so important** because if that system could get built it would prove the case."
>
> **Rick Harnish,** *Midwest High Speed Rail Association*

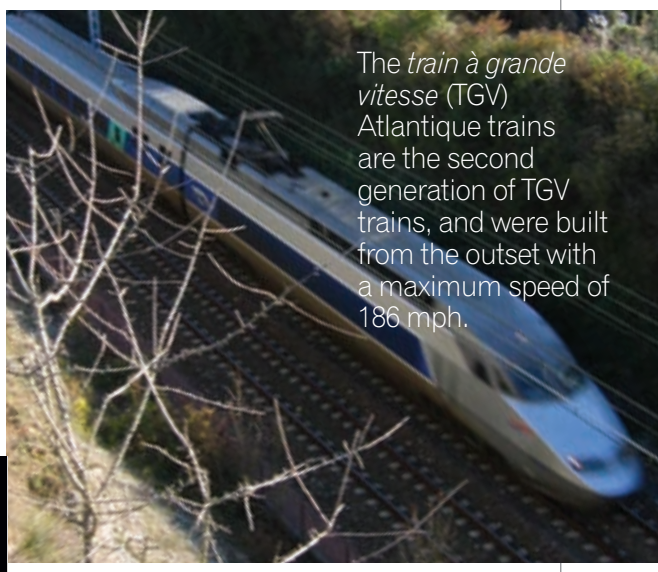
On the surface, supporting high-speed rail seems like a no-brainer for Schwarzenegger. The Golden State governor garnered considerable press for his sudden shift toward promoting green policies. According to studies conducted by the CHSRA, the train would serve nearly 117 million passengers by 2030 while generating annual revenue of between $2.6 billion and $3.9 billion. In addition, it would cost two to three times less than expanding highways to accommodate the same need. High-speed trains, which run on electricity, could also have a potentially huge positive impact on California's air quality.

Ardent supporters say the train would eventually pay for itself, and even the most pessimistic are forced to admit that the train would generate more money than highways, which cost millions annually to maintain and repair. One would think it should be a slam-dunk for the suddenly green-loving governor. Not exactly.

According to Sabrina Lockhart, a spokeswoman for Schwarzenegger, the CHSRA must explain how it plans to raise the additional $30 billion before the governor throws his weight behind high-speed rail.

"He is asking the Legislature to indefinitely delay putting this $10 billion bond on the ballot in November [2008]," she said. "What he is waiting for is for the [California] High-Speed Rail Authority, which is the body that is responsible for developing the plan for high-speed rail in the state, to come up with a comprehensive financial plan for building the system. It's expected to be more than $40 billion so what the governor is essentially saying is, 'Before we ask California's taxpayers to mortgage $10 billion plus interest, we have to know where the remaining $30 billion is going to come from.'"

For months, rumors circulated that the governor planned to snuff out high-speed rail once and for all. Schwarzenegger wants "to quietly kill this — and not go out and tell the people that high-speed rail isn't in the future,"



The *train à grande vitesse* (TGV) Atlantique trains are the second generation of TGV trains, and were built from the outset with a maximum speed of 186 mph.

state Sen. Dean Florez told the *Los Angeles Times* in April. But suddenly in May, Schwarzenegger penned an editorial in *The Fresno Bee* where he appeared to have shifted his position on high-speed rail.

"I strongly support high-speed rail for California, and especially for the San Joaquin Valley," the governor wrote. But he also added, "Before asking taxpayers to approve spending nearly $10 billion plus interest, it is reasonable to expect the authority and its advisers to identify with confidence where we will find the remaining $30 billion."

Herein lies a classic example of government bureaucracy.

PHOTO BY DAVID MONNIAUX

The TGV (*train à grande vitesse*, French for "high-speed train") is France's high-speed rail service, and holds the record for the fastest wheeled train, having reached 357 mph on April 3, 2007. The TGV also holds the world's highest average speed for a regular passenger service. TGV trainsets travel at up to 200 mph in commercial use.

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The California High-Speed Rail project is being planned by the California High-Speed Rail Authority, which will design, build and operate the system. An implementation plan approved in August 2005 estimated it would take eight to 11 years to "develop and begin operation of an initial segment of the California high-speed train."

The CHSRA says it needs $103 million to continue its work on planning the rail system. The governor says he'll support high-speed rail if the authority comes up with a way to pay for it, but in the meantime, cuts its budget to the point the CHSRA claims is barely enough to keep its doors open. Adding to the quagmire is the fact that to drum up any private investment, backers will likely need to present proof that California voters support building the railway. But unless the bond goes on the ballot, it will be difficult to prove such voter support exists.

> "Before we ask California's taxpayers to mortgage **$10 billion plus interest**, we have to know where the remaining $30 billion is going to come from."
>
> **Sabrina Lockhart,** *spokeswoman, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger*

Despite these obstacles, Mehdi Morshed remains cautiously optimistic that there is a future for high-speed rail in California.

"If you were to follow what the governor suggested, then basically the project will be put on hold, and probably for all practical purposes it won't be going anywhere," he said. "Based on what I hear and the people in the Legislature we've been talking to, there's a very strong desire on the part of the California Legislature to continue the funding for the project, and there didn't seem to be a great deal of support — virtually no support — for the governor's proposal to postpone the bond. The Legislature doesn't seem to be inclined to go along with what the governor wants."

At a May 23 board meeting, however, the CHSRA may have shot itself in the foot. Presented at the meeting was a plan for a phased construction process. The phasing plan, should the rail bond be approved, would call for initial construction of the track to run from Anaheim, in Southern California, to San Francisco in the North. By choosing this lower-cost strategy, the board is obviously hoping to improve the chances of making high-speed rail a reality.

> "It's not impossible, and **people need to tell their legislators** they need real travel choices."
>
> **Rick Harnish,** *executive director, Midwest High Speed Rail Association*

Unfortunately such phased construction entirely omits the San Diego and Sacramento metropolitan areas — nearly five million voters who would be asked to approve a $40 billion project with nothing but the promise of a rail extension to come years later. As voters in these cities look around for the promised freeways that were never built, such a sell would be difficult.

Conductor Wanted

As California aptly demonstrates, high-speed rail projects need a high-profile advocate. The various rail authorities are simply not enough to make these railways a reality.

Rick Harnish is the executive director of the Midwest High Speed Rail Association, a nonprofit advocacy group trying to spark interest in a high-speed railway that would connect major Midwestern cities. Harnish said people should demand that government step up and provide alternative transportation options. He added that if California made it happen, it would be far easier for high-speed rail to flourish elsewhere in the country.

"It's not impossible, and people need to tell their legislators they need real travel choices," he said. "In a national sense, California is so important because if that system could get built, it would prove the case. The key is people throughout the country need to start telling their elected officials they want high-quality train service, and they expect their elected officials to come up with a solution to make it happen. If the governor said we're going to link L.A. to the Bay Area within five years, it could be done very quickly and at a fraction of the cost of comparable highway capacity."

Mehdi Morshed voiced similar sentiments — despite having only 1 percent of the requested $103 million approved by the governor.

"The cost of a high-speed train is $40 billion, and that's a lot of money," he said. "But, over the same period of time that we're talking about building a high-speed train, California is going to spend more than $200 billion on highways and other transit modes in the state. Relative to all the other expenditures, it's not that huge of a change."

High-speed rail in the United States has failed everywhere it has been proposed. Some blame an addiction to the automobile. Such an argument is easily disputed by the fact that most people have no choice but to use a car. Most, however, point to a lack of political will. And as Mehdi Morshed said, where would we be today without those who took risks in the past?

"Look 20 years down the road; look at where your state is going to be; look at your children and grandchildren," he said. "What are you going to do about their mobility and air quality? Are you going to leave them high and dry? Or are you going to do something to prepare for them, just like people before prepared for us?" GT

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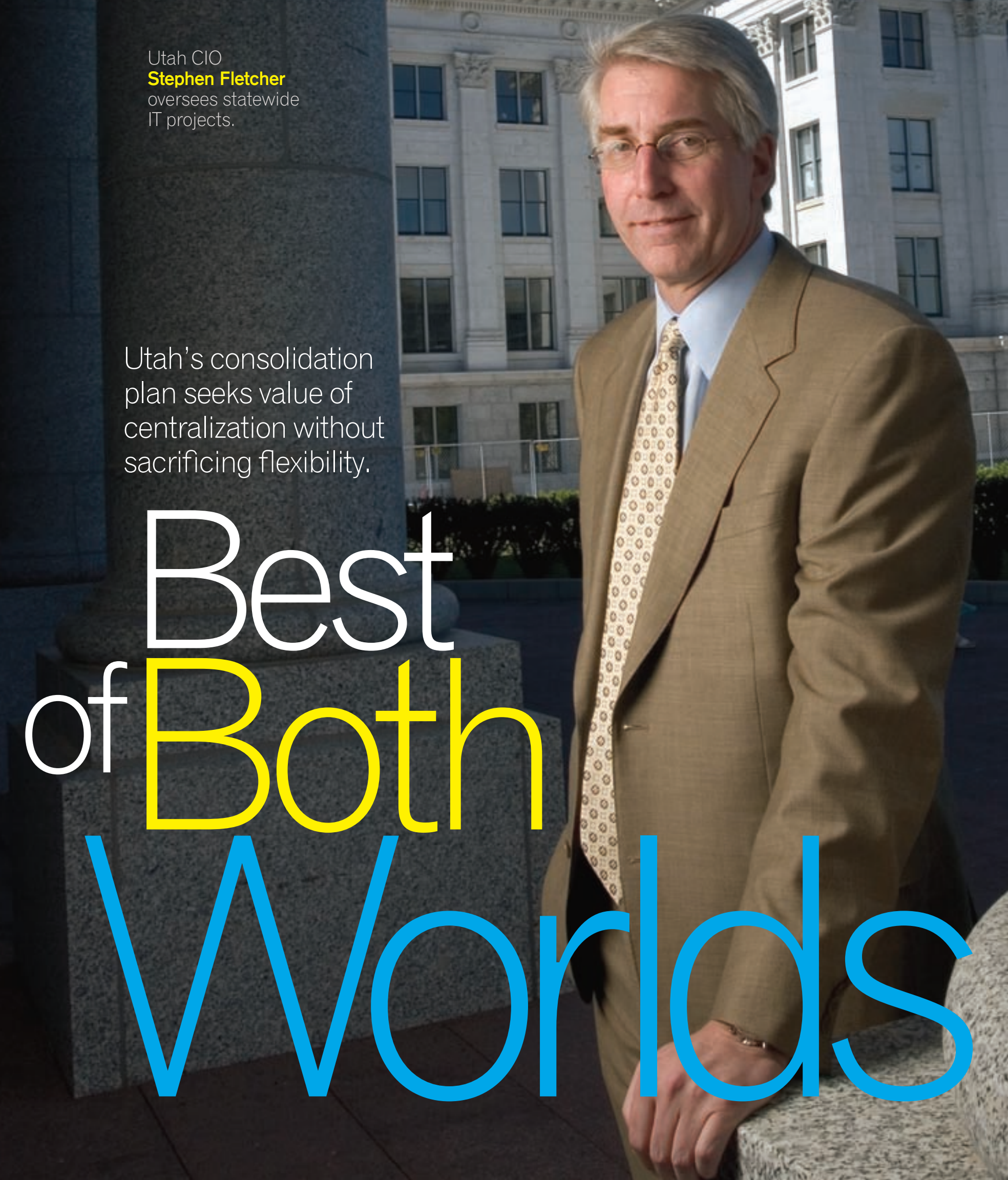

Utah CIO **Stephen Fletcher** oversees statewide IT projects.

Utah's consolidation plan seeks value of centralization without sacrificing flexibility.

Best of Both Worlds

ANDY OPSAHL | STAFF WRITER | PHOTOS BY KELLY LaDUKE

Utah's efforts to centralize technology mirror a national trend where state governments are searching for effective ways to consolidate their IT operations. Those efforts have produced everything from highly centralized IT management structures in states such as Michigan and Virginia, to loosely federated attempts in other areas.

The Utah state CIO job became a lot more consequential thanks to legislation passing all state IT authority over to the position in 2005. For years, Utah agencies controlled their own IT, essentially forcing the state CIO to sit and look pretty while they made their own hiring, firing and budget decisions over technology.

"We had somewhat of a paper tiger, and we wanted to create a true CIO position," said Utah Rep. David Clark.

Previous Utah state CIOs struggled to enact statewide consolidations because at least one agency would inevitably decline participation, hence, the state created the Utah Department of Technology Services (DTS) and transformed all state IT workers into DTS employees. The governor appointed Stephen Fletcher state CIO to develop a transition process that satisfied all agencies and incorporated their input.

Fletcher now controls all state IT projects and has already cut costs. But, in a move to ensure that agency needs are met, the DTS assigned an IT director to each department. These directors act as liaisons between their agencies and the CIO, and discuss and suggest changes in resources or products that could improve operations.

Utah's approach seeks to gain the benefits of IT centralization without sacrificing the flexibility and specialized knowledge developed by agency-specific IT staff.

Giving the Tiger Teeth

The Utah Legislature passed HB 109 in April 2005, creating the DTS and setting up Fletcher to assume more power than any prior CIOs in the state's recent history.

"We had always had a CIO," Clark said, "but he did not have purse strings or hiring and firing responsibility."

In 2004, then-Utah CIO Val Oveson gave the Legislature several testimonials of his frustration over his lack of power to effect change in state IT, prompting Clark and state Sen. Beverly Evans to spend several months evaluating state agencies. They discovered that roughly 80 percent of the applications on agency computers statewide were the same.

Clark envisioned the efficiency gains that might result from centralizing maintenance of those applications under one agency. The idea was to streamline IT work for the staff, dividing the staff into groups that would each specialize in different aspects of state IT.

But he and Evans also found agencies were very nimble at developing applications for their specific needs. Those projects were best left under individual agency control, Clark said.

For example, the Utah Department of Transportation continues to create custom solutions for monitoring traffic and finding ways to more efficiently utilize agency assets.

"We don't need a 'one program fits all' for tasks like that," Clark said.

The difference is that now individual agencies must clear custom application projects with the DTS first. The individual staff members working in the specialization groups for statewide IT projects will physically remain in the agency offices that housed them before the IT authority shift.

Early Results

Fletcher consolidated statewide mainframe maintenance, and cut $2.5 million from the state's $15 million mainframe budget. He used the extra money to roll out IT security-enhancing devices for all agencies, including physical security mechanisms, firewall improvements and newer screening technologies.

He also cut travel time and frequency for remote IT repair technicians.

Many Utah agencies had several offices located throughout the state, which made centrally servicing IT impractical. They hired remote IT repair technicians who traveled to the various offices, but it was an expensive solution, Fletcher said.

"We realized that some [remote] technicians were passing other technicians in other cities on the way to service a customer," he explained. "We asked, 'Why don't you send the closest technician?'"

Those closer technicians couldn't do the repairs because they worked for different agencies.

Now that Fletcher oversees all of the state's IT activities, he sends whichever technician is closest to the office needing a repair. The drop in travel time cut remote repair technician costs by 20 percent to 30 percent, he said.

The change in authority also lets Fletcher centrally manage the state's backbone ring, which connects agencies to the state's network. He renegotiated services with the state's backbone ring vendor, increasing its capacity from 155 megabits to 1 gigabit. The network is now six and one-half times faster, according to Fletcher.

The renegotiation also added more access points to the network.

Minimizing Culture Shock

All state IT workers in Utah technically work for the DTS, but maintain the same relationships with their prior agencies by remaining in those agencies' offices. Agencies found this approach made the transition less of a culture shock, said Gregory Gardner, deputy director of the Utah Department of Workforce Services. Some IT employees changed locations to become the DTS's upper-management team.

Gardner said he was initially skeptical of the power shift.

"We had a really close relationship between IT and our business users — we had built some great applications — so we were concerned that a huge, monolithic organization would be built and we would lose those on-the-ground relationships," Gardner recalled. "But when Steve [Fletcher] came on and handled the transition process by visiting all of the agencies, understanding the needs of the executive directors, keeping the IT employees located within the agencies and having a very incremental way to make changes, it proved that the fears were unfounded."

As part of the DTS's transition, **91 percent** of its employees were converted from merit career service to at-will employees to create organizational flexibility, according to the Utah state Web site.

Gardner said he supported the power shift after Fletcher demonstrated his commitment to substantively including agency input in the decision-making process.

"One thing Steve did before he formed the new department, he conducted an extensive process with the executive directors, laying out all of their initial business requirements or business needs for the new department. He actually produced a report and used that as guidance to move forward."

Fletcher produced the state's first set of written, formalized service-level metrics, which gave it a standard to measure itself against, Gardner said. "We did day-one service-level agreements, which were really a reflection of the existing service-level agreements, but they had never been written down. They were unstated."

Fletcher said this approach helped sharpen the DTS's vision. "We are able to focus on the results the agencies want us to achieve, and it gives us a great scorecard," he said. "It gives us our objectives, helps us eliminate anecdotal information and have better conversations with our agencies."

Gardner said the DTS can't completely standardize the state's desktop management process because several agencies use custom applications. The DTS will form a specialization team to manage a large portion of desktop

maintenance throughout the state, but the IT workers residing in individual agencies will to continue maintaining custom applications, he said.

Since the DTS controls all state IT employees, individual agencies can reach outside IT workers in addition to those already located in their offices to help develop new custom applications. The agency negotiates a billing rate with the DTS to pay for the extra help.

"We've made a commitment not to disrupt services," Gardner said. "If there is a change, it's going to improve services, and it's going to be more cost-effective. Steve has been careful to make change incrementally. We're all fully apprised of the change. We have the opportunity to comment on it and shape it."

Fletcher recruited Gardner to help with the transition.

"I was in kind of a unique situation," Gardner recalled. "I worked half of the time for our department, and the other half for Steve on the transition team. I helped Steve visit agencies and write up the findings. We got to help define the management structure. I was in charge of the organizational work group that helped define his organization structure for day one. He was really inclusive."

Forfeiting the Safety Net

Legislators sought to make Fletcher's staff adjustment more flexible by eliminating the bureaucratic hurdles to firing employees.

"If someone was hired 25 years ago," Clark said, "that may not be the best person to be doing up-to-date technology today."

But merit status made unfit employees difficult to fire. If an employee had merit status, he or she could appeal a disciplinary action on five different levels before the state enacted it.

But many think merit status is outdated, said Charles Woods, a managing director with SMART Business Advisory and Consulting, adding that it appeared in government roughly 70 years ago to produce stable government employment. Before that, each time a new governor took office, he or she typically brought his or her own army of employees. Many would lose their jobs with gubernatorial changes.

"The merit system came about for people who weren't involved in elections, who were competent, who wanted to be professional employees with state government when the administration changed," Woods said. "That was the sole purpose of civil protection, decades ago."

Woods said that culture no longer existed for most state jobs. "There's kind of a generational push to say, 'We really don't need civil service.' It's like unions. A lot of people feel, in the case of IT, it hinders recruitment, which is highly competitive."

Woods added that removing merit status also lets states hire people more quickly.

Fletcher and the Legislature developed a strategy to remove that merit status without mass hostility from agencies.

"We did not require everyone to forgo their merit status," Clark said. "But we did offer incentives to those willing to do so. We wanted a carrot approach."

Each employee who gave up his or her merit status received a three-step pay increase. Gardner said it amounted to roughly 8 percent.

"It hasn't been used in a negative way," Gardner said. "If there is someone needing new skills, Steve is committed to offering training resources to get the job done — not just throwing somebody out."

Fletcher said he needed IT technicians who were familiar with new programming languages, like Java or .NET. Many current Utah programmers use COBOL, which the state is eliminating.

Fletcher said he preferred to train those COBOL programmers as Java or .NET programmers, rather than laying them off and hiring new people. He said training people new to working in government was more expensive than retraining seasoned employees because they already understand government culture.

More than 90 percent of the employees chose to forfeit their merit status.

"It has been a healthy thing because you're more motivated to do a good job," Gardner said. "You're motivated to keep your skills current. Plus you get paid more, so it has been a win-win." GT

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Synopsis: There may soon be a way for 911 callers to transmit photos from their cell phones directly to 911 call centers.

Technology: Emergency call center software.

Jurisdictions: New York City; Tennessee; Indiana.

Texting 911?

911 call centers may soon be equipped to receive text messages and digital photos from callers.

BY JIM McKAY | JUSTICE EDITOR

During the recent Virginia Tech University shootings, students used their cell phones to communicate via text messaging and to inconspicuously snap photos of unfolding events.

Such information would have been useful to law enforcement officials who were hunting the killer, but because there's no way to transmit text messages, photos or videos to operators when calling 911, police officers couldn't access the evidence.

This could soon change.

New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg announced in January 2007 that his city would develop a system that allows emergency 911 centers, and eventually 311 centers, to receive digital photos and videos from callers.

Other localities and states also want to improve the level of information collected by 911 call center operators.

A Better 911

The concept of a system that will allow digital photos to be sent directly to 911 call centers was unveiled at the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO) annual conference in August 2006.

The company behind the system, PowerPhone, a Connecticut-based crisis communications training and consulting group, has been at work in the lab refining the software. Public safety answering points (PSAPs) — county or city agencies responsible for answering 911 calls for emergency assistance — could be accepting photos from 911 callers by next year.

"It's a positive step forward toward the next generation of 911 systems," said Patrick Halley, government affairs director of the National Emergency Number Association (NENA). "My understanding is we're not quite where you can dial 911, take a picture, push a button and send it off to a 911 center while you're still on the phone. We'd like to get there, and that's certainly what our

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organization and the standard folks are looking at."

Other jurisdictions are also looking into such a deployment. Indiana call centers have tested the concept with sent text messages, but are still in the research mode. In Tennessee, some call centers can receive digital photos, but they must first go to an IT person's e-mail address before they are sent to the 911 call center. Right now, that's about as close as it gets to such a system.

"The current plan is you call 911 and say you have a photo of a criminal or a crash or whatever it is, and they say, 'OK, text message it to this address,'" Halley said. "Then you do it and call back. That's not ideal, but it's definitely a positive step to getting us to where we need to be."

Software on the Way?

The improved version of the PowerPhone system, called Incident Linked Multimedia (ILM), is slated for preview at the August 2007 APCO conference, according to Greg Sheehan, director of marketing for PowerPhone.

"What we've done to our first iteration of the technology is made some modifications based on the agencies we've talked with that are interested in using it to better accommodate their needs," Sheehan said. "We found that the original concept of the product is good, but we're trying to build a little more into the product. We're in discussions with several people who are interested in piloting the software."

Sheehan said as soon as the software is ready, PSAPs with ILM can accept digital photos or videos directly from 911 callers. "There's that perception that you have to wait for a next-generation 911 system to be developed," he said. "That's really not the truth. You need an Internet connection and a computer on one end to receive it, then you can receive those photos at your 911 center."

> "It's a **positive step forward** toward the next generation of 911 systems."
>
> **Patrick Halley,** *government affairs director, National Emergency Number Association*

When deployed, the system will work like this: A 911 call comes into a PSAP, and the caller describes the problem and reports that he or she can send a photo to the PSAP.

The PSAP call handler will send a text message to the caller's cell phone — while the caller is still on the line — requesting the photo.

The caller replies to the message with the photo attached. The photo is then stored and can be sent to first responders as they head to the scene.

"We're designing our software to get photos to the 911 center and then allow them to route it where they think it needs to go, kind of like the phone company," Sheehan said.

Safeguarding from Pranksters

One difficulty will be ensuring legitimate callers can transmit vital data without delay, while making sure the data is actually useful and that pranksters don't flood the PSAP with bogus images.

"There's a process where you have to be able to verify what's being sent in [and] make sure the picture is timely — maybe somebody is sending a picture from two months ago," said Nicholas Sbordone, spokesman for the New York City Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications. "There are a lot of questions we have to work out to make sure that we're getting timely information and appropriate information. Those are the kinds of things we're sorting through now."

Sbordone said the technology fits with Bloomberg's theme of a more transparent, accessible and accountable government. "On the public safety side, it makes sense to be able to text things in real time," he said, adding that the cost of the project has yet to be determined.

The capability will be part of the next generation of 911, Halley said. "When [NENA] started, our mantra was, 'One nation, one number.' Now we're sort of adding, 'Any device, anywhere, anytime.' But there's got to be some limitations on what devices and what information is appropriate. We have to figure out operationally how to design a system so only the information we want, or that is authorized, is sent. You don't want anybody to be able to send anything they want."

He said part of the solution is modernizing current 911 systems, and public safety officials know full well that more and more people use text messages and send each other pictures snapped by cell phones. PSAPs are hindered by the limitations of the existing, circuit-switched analog system, and 911 systems aren't designed to receive packets of data with photos, he said.

The challenge facing 911 call centers is to find a way to address current technology with old 911 systems.

"How do we modernize our 911 systems' inherent limitations to get to where we have a more robust IP-based system," Halley said, "so there is a possibility of sending video, text, pictures, into 911 without having to do all these work-around solutions?"

Stay tuned. GT

Texting 911 in Boston and L.A.

A surge in violent crimes and a street culture becoming more distant from law enforcement has moved Boston to allow witnesses of crimes to send anonymous text messages to report information about crimes.

Police are hoping the Text a Tip program will prompt more response from witnesses who are typically afraid to call and report information to police in a street culture that punishes people who "snitch."

An informant can type the word "tip" onto his phone and send the message to police. The system will block the sender's identification. Police will then text a message back to the sender asking for details.

The Los Angeles Police Department announced in June that it was beginning plans to develop a system that will eventually accept digital photos, text messages and video with 911 calls. Officials said that the first phase of the system, soliciting digital photos, could be up and running in late 2007 but that the project would take three years or more to complete.

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Synopsis: A software-driven solution promises to push GIS data out onto BlackBerry mobile devices.

Jurisdictions: City and county of San Diego.

Technologies: Laptops and handheld computing devices.

Contact: Nader Tirandazi, IT group manager, Office of the Mayor, 858/492-5049, <ntirandazi@sandiego.gov>.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF PICTOMETRY

New technologies bring GIS data into the hands of mobile workers looking for real-time geographic information.

BY ADAM STONE | CONTRIBUTING WRITER

What good is a map if you can't read it when you need it? This is a fundamental question that's plagued GIS planners in San Diego, who've been searching for a convenient way to get geographic data to mobile city and county workers.

"The problem is all about accessibility of data," said Andrew Abouna, executive director of the San Diego Geographic Information Source (SanGIS), whose job it is to maintain and promote the use of a regional geographic data warehouse for the San Diego area.

Now Abouna said he found a solution — software that'll help SanGIS, a GIS partnership created in July 1997 between the city of San Diego and San Diego County, send GIS data to BlackBerry smartphones in the near future.

Static Maps

The issue, as Abouna describes it, is that mobile workers can carry map information on the go, but the information is static. A map on a laptop, for instance, can show the situation on the ground, but any change to that map can only show on the laptop if the device is synchronized at the home office. True mobility would mean the capacity to map evolving situations, such as missed service routes or the changing boundaries of a wildfire.

Nader Tirandazi is the IT group manager for the San Diego Office of the Mayor, and oversees IT throughout the city's public works agencies, including the Environmental Services Department. His office is working with SanGIS to build a prototype for channeling information about refuse collection to BlackBerry devices.

"This probably will be the most effective area for us," Tirandazi said. "Look at a missed trash stop. When a citizen calls for a missed pickup, you could actually send that order to a BlackBerry and a supervisor could look up that address on a map, send out the closest driver and then close out that work order."

Today that order is e-mailed to a manager's cell phone who then radios a driver. But there's no map functionality to show drivers' locations to assess which driver might be closest to the site.

Planners call this functionality a big leap forward, but does a BlackBerry really make more sense than a laptop for this kind or work? Yes and no.

Diverse Devices

It's technically feasible, and no less difficult, to push GIS data out to a laptop. All things being equal, Abouna says the BlackBerry format has many advantages.

"Size really is the issue," he said. For workers on the road, especially emergency workers looking for easy access to location information, the handheld device is, well, easier to handle. "You could do it with a laptop, but obviously it is bigger and more cumbersome, which makes it less user-friendly. It also has a longer startup time as compared to a handheld device."

To this extent, handhelds would appear to have a decided advantage for employees needing to access GIS data.

The fact that the smaller devices are easier to use is reflected by the fact that many city and county employees already buy the handhelds for their own purposes, despite the fact that government authorities aren't yet paying for these devices, Abouna said.

As prototype applications start to come online, he speculated, supervisors may begin to acquire BlackBerries for their workers.

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> "I would rather **put everything out** on BlackBerries because they are the **least expensive tools**."
>
> **Nader Tirandazi,** *IT group manager, San Diego Office of the Mayor*

Among other things, prototypes might help supervisors see which employees could benefit most from these devices. Less clear is the long-term cost of ownership of a handheld versus a laptop. Abouna expects this will factor in if and when government offices begin to acquire BlackBerries.

Despite its convenient size and other advantages, the BlackBerry may not to be a perfect fit for all occasions.

"There are areas within the business units where the laptop would be more instrumental," Tirandazi said. If a particular application is exceptionally data-heavy, or if users require a highly detailed view of a map, the big screen and the processing muscle of a laptop may be required. "I have seen quite a few demonstrations of BlackBerries and Treos, of pushing information out into the field [with these devices], but you really have to look at the level of information, the amount of data and how you would expect to be able to see it."

Nonetheless, the convenient size and low cost encouraged Tirandazi to embrace the handhelds.

"I would rather put everything out on BlackBerries," he said, "because they are the least expensive tools."

Putting It to Work

SanGIS is just now developing its first BlackBerry-based applications. A pilot with the San Diego Environmental Services Department has been put on the back burner for now.

That application would map out refuse-truck routes, allow supervisors to map the location of missed pickups and simplify the process of rerouting drivers as needed.

Another early application might involve land surveying. A field worker could query the GIS database for information based on land value, owner name and especially property lines. "Let's say code enforcement is in the field, and they need to verify zoning or ownership of a particular parcel," Abouna said. "With this they wouldn't have to bring all their paperwork with them ahead of time."

Driven by Freeance Mobile software, these applications could also be used to make custom forms that would let field workers collect data onsite and file it virtually automatically.

Abouna points to the prospect of a field crew inspecting sewer pipes or water pipes. Perhaps the crew has three or four different sets of sizes to choose from for a given job. Rather than specifying item by item what's needed, a crewmember could simply indicate choices on a prepopulated, customized form.

Likewise, city officials might be assessing sidewalk conditions, using a fixed set of indicators. Here again, officials could use a preset form, designed to be accessed easily via a BlackBerry.

As envisioned, the system would also help city agencies make more effective use of their existing databases. The Environmental Services Department, for example, keeps a detailed database of locations, routes and incoming service calls. Right now there's no simple, automated way to provide that information to wireless users.

Abouna said he expects to use the new software to tap into that data, overlay it against other GIS information and make it available to workers in the field. Using a BlackBerry, mobile staff will be able turn off and on different layers of the map.

"They can do queries about the data," he said, "and if they want to record new information using GPS, they can do that using the same device and send it right back to the server." GT

Showing Boundaries

SanGIS maps include general planning area designations, county water authority boundaries, community planning area (CPA) and/or CPA sponsor group boundaries, jurisdictional boundaries, hydrological features, freeways and major roads.

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Neighborhood Watch

The Big Apple brings local officials into the 311 loop.

Synopsis: New York City aims to bring community officials back in touch with city residents through 311.

Jurisdictions: New York City, Miami-Dade County, Fla.

Technologies: 311 nonemergency call centers.

Contact: Bruce Lai, chief of staff, New York City Councilwoman Gale Brewer <bruce.lai@council.nyc.ny.us>.

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BY JESSICA WEIDLING | STAFF WRITER

New York City is the largest direct-service governmental body in the nation.

With hundreds of service offerings, more than 100 agencies, 350,000 city employees and a growing 8 million resident population (with an extra 2 million people converging on the city by day), only the state governments of New York and California and the federal government compete with New York City in size.

Because of the city's enormity and great service demands, an otherwise simple problem can become a complex issue that involves many agencies. This presents a challenge for New York City's 311 call center, which handles most of the city's nonemergency calls, local government questions and requests for service, and has already fielded 50 million calls since its March 2003 debut, according to the Mayor's Office of Operations.

"The issue is that 311 is very popular, and the result is that people call it for everything imaginable, including very complicated human services, building inspections, etc.," said Councilwoman Gale Brewer, a Democrat who represents Manhattan's Upper West Side.

Although Brewer, who chairs the council's technology committee, is a 311 advocate, she's forthright in pointing out its limitations. "The system is so responsive," she said, "but the city is so big and the problems are so complicated that the 311 system needs to utilize some local resources."

By "local resources," Brewer said she means government officials, like herself, and other community representatives possessing invaluable insight on how to get government problems fixed fast, but have been somewhat circumvented by 311.

In response, city technology officials searched for ways to bring civic networks into 311's framework as a way to tap the knowledge of people who know New York's neighborhoods best.

Localizing 311

Since Baltimore's 311 center opened in 1996, the concept has proliferated in dozens of U.S. cities. Once used as a way to deflect callers from 911 lines, city governments now use 311 to consolidate city phone numbers and improve accountability.

Call takers at 311 centers use advanced computer systems to track reports, aggregate data and transfer calls to other government agencies or answer basic questions about government.

There's little doubt that 311 can transform a city: Citizens calling to report trash had a hand in raising New York City's cleanliness rating to its highest score since the rating system was created in the '70s.

But consolidating city phone numbers inadvertently limited the people who residents reach out to.

"I think some [elected officials] feel disenfranchised by the fact that they might be getting fewer calls from residents because they're calling 311," said Bruce Lai, Brewer's chief of staff.

311 gives citizens less of a reason to call local politicians who once used their "in" with city liaisons and local knowledge to help constituents get around bureaucratic logjams — and then get their votes.

"I'm sure in big politics cities — New York and Chicago come to mind — there was some worry about losing touch with the voters, or more precisely, losing touch with votes," said Gary Allen, editor of *DISPATCH Monthly* magazine, a publication about public safety communications. "But even though they might be losing the initial citizen calls, they're definitely gaining better information."

This is especially true if politicians can view 311 data showing what people are calling about, which can reflect potential voter concerns. New York City's 311 call center

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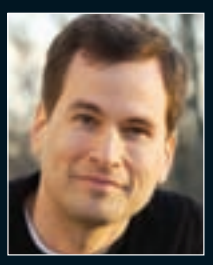

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> "Most of the cities in the world could **fit into New York City**. We're trying to break it down so people can relate to their neighborhood."
>
> **Gale Brewer,** *New York City councilwoman, Manhattan's Upper West Side*

didn't pass along call data to elected officials, Brewer said, which is why she authored Local Law 47, which mandates that city administrators release monthly reports of data collected on calls made to 311 to elected officials and the public.

The law was passed by the City Council in May 2005, and in June 2006 the first reports were made publicly available.

With the law, New York City joined other big cities in giving politicians and the public access to precinct- and neighborhood-level reports that transform unrefined data into potentially useful information to hatch new policy or give an argument for change.

Miami-Dade County's 311 system has fielded 2.2 million calls since opening in December 2004, but is considered pint-sized compared to New York City's service demand.

Local Law 47 requires the New York City Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications (DoITT) to issue monthly reports to the City Council, the Public Advocate (the elected citywide ombudswoman), community boards (local representative bodies focused on neighborhood issues) and the public regarding 311 call data. The data is cataloged by inquiries and requests for service, and tells what agency handled each situation, what the call was about, how many cases were opened, how many were closed and the average resolution time.

The information is grouped under region and can pertain to a particular council district, borough, community board district or ZIP code, or it can take a citywide view.

When asked whether Brewer's office uses the reports, Lai admitted the office hadn't relied on them heavily so far. But he added that a recent change in the report format makes the data more useful.

Nicholas Sbordone, spokesman for DoITT, said the Local Law 47 reports were upgraded in March 2007 — where once users waded through a 700-page document listing all community board information, now people can skip straight to several pages of more specific information.

The law also encouraged various parts of New York City government to intermingle, charging DoITT CIO and Commissioner Paul Cosgrave to meet quarterly with community boards and others to discuss the reports, and other pressing issues. *Government Technology's Public CIO* magazine (*Transformation in 1,000 Days,* June/July 2007) takes a closer look at how Cosgrave has embraced community board involvement.

"The meetings are not just to talk about the reports, but also discuss other enhancements we can make for the community boards, and to bring them in as a partner," Sbordone said, explaining that community boards are a good resource as informants on neighborhood happenings.

> "I'm sure in **big politics cities** — New York and Chicago come to mind — there was some worry about **losing touch with the voters**, or more precisely, losing touch with votes."
>
> **Gary Allen,** *editor, DISPATCH Monthly magazine*

Closing the Loop

Now Brewer is suggesting that New York City should take the next step — give local officials, such as community boards, real-time access to 311 information, which she said would let 311 callers tap into experts who know how to navigate city-government channels.

"We know every blade of grass, every building, every unit, every person in our neighborhood," Brewer said.

She remembered a caller who complained about water spurting from a neighborhood fire hydrant. Brewer reacted by first calling the Department of Environmental Protection — the agency that oversees citywide water issues. But as several hours passed, and the department didn't act, she took a different tack.

"Because I happened to know the city well," she said, "I called the fire department locally, and I know they have a wrench, and they turned it off in three minutes."

The Miami-Dade County, Fla., 311 call center — the nation's first multijurisdictional 311 center — will soon make real-time data available to local officials, said Judi Zito, director of the Miami-Dade County Government Information Center. The call center already offers ServiceStat, a year-old program that lets agencies and county and city leaders see nightly updated information on service requests, recurrent problems and government inefficiencies.

Through the system, city and county officials also have access to the same knowledge database that 311 call takers do. "If they receive a call from a constituent in their district office about a peacock gone wild, they can type in 'peacock,' and they find the same information that [311 operators] will," Zito said.

Sharing information between 311 and local governments is mutually valuable, Zito said.

"Through ServiceStat now we have sort of a countywide view of what's going on in the organization instead of a departmental view," she said. "So we can look at the potholes, the stray dogs and the missed garbage pickups together rather than trying to make sense of data that really didn't make sense before. That's been the great benefit in all of this."

But Miami-Dade's 311 center, which has fielded 2.2 million calls since opening in December 2004, is pint-sized compared to New York City's mammoth operation and large service demand.

"Most of the cities in the world could fit into New York City," Brewer said. "We're trying to break it down so people can relate to their neighborhood." GT

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product news

two cents

our take on the latest technology

Lenovo 3000 N100

At *Government Technology* magazine, we see quite a few sleek-looking laptops.

So the Lenovo 3000 N100 isn't one of them — big deal. Rather, with its ultra-large, white letters on black keys, plenty of wrist room and a mere 5.9 pounds for a 14.1-inch screen, it says comfort — really loud and clear.

The other thing it says loud and clear is, "Help is only a button away." And it really is.

Above the laptop's keyboard, the Lenovo Care button, clearly indicated with an orange toolbox logo, isn't just a simple road map to a resource center, but also to defragmenting your machine, backing up data, managing security and other important things that are usually buried in the maze behind the start button.

Another nice feature of the machine is the point and click touchpad, which lets you tap your finger on the pad instead of clicking the buttons below.

In practice, however, it wasn't easy. I often found myself too heavy-handed for this particular touchpad. If I let my finger linger for a second while finding my way through a Web site, it would automatically click wherever my cursor was and whisk me away to another page or highlight large portions of a page, as if I had selected them. Even with some practice, I still couldn't completely get the hang of it, but fortunately these incidents could be fixed by hitting the back button.

What never let me down was the fingerprint reader. It was so easy to set up, I barely remember doing it. I only entered two fingerprints although there was room for more, and the reader was so accurate, it rarely asked me to reswipe.

The Lenovo 3000 N100 also has some impressive multimedia capacity. It comes with an optional camera that can take pictures and record movies. It sports four USB 2.0 ports (three vertical and one horizontal — a nice feature for a laptop); a 4-in-1 card reader; a PCMCIA slot; and also has S-Video, VGA, RJ11, RJ45 and 1394 FireWire (4-pin) connections.

The test unit came with Windows XP Professional, but according to the Lenovo Web site, it's fully Vista-ready, as long as you are too.

The Lenovo 3000 N100 is also ready for action and lots of it. I downloaded a free trial of Adobe PageMaker, opened a few Internet windows, got a couple of instant message conversations going, and the laptop handled it easily.

I should note, however, that the machine was a bit stubborn at first. For the first few weeks, whenever I opened the My Computer window, it froze. Control+Alt+Delete had to bail me out a few times. When I finally decided to report the problem to our tech guy, it was gone. And I was left muttering, "But I promise … it wasn't working." Eventually the laptop and I reconciled, and everything has been swell since.

Overall, the Lenovo 3000 N100 may not be the belle of the ball. But sometimes, it's all about personality. GT

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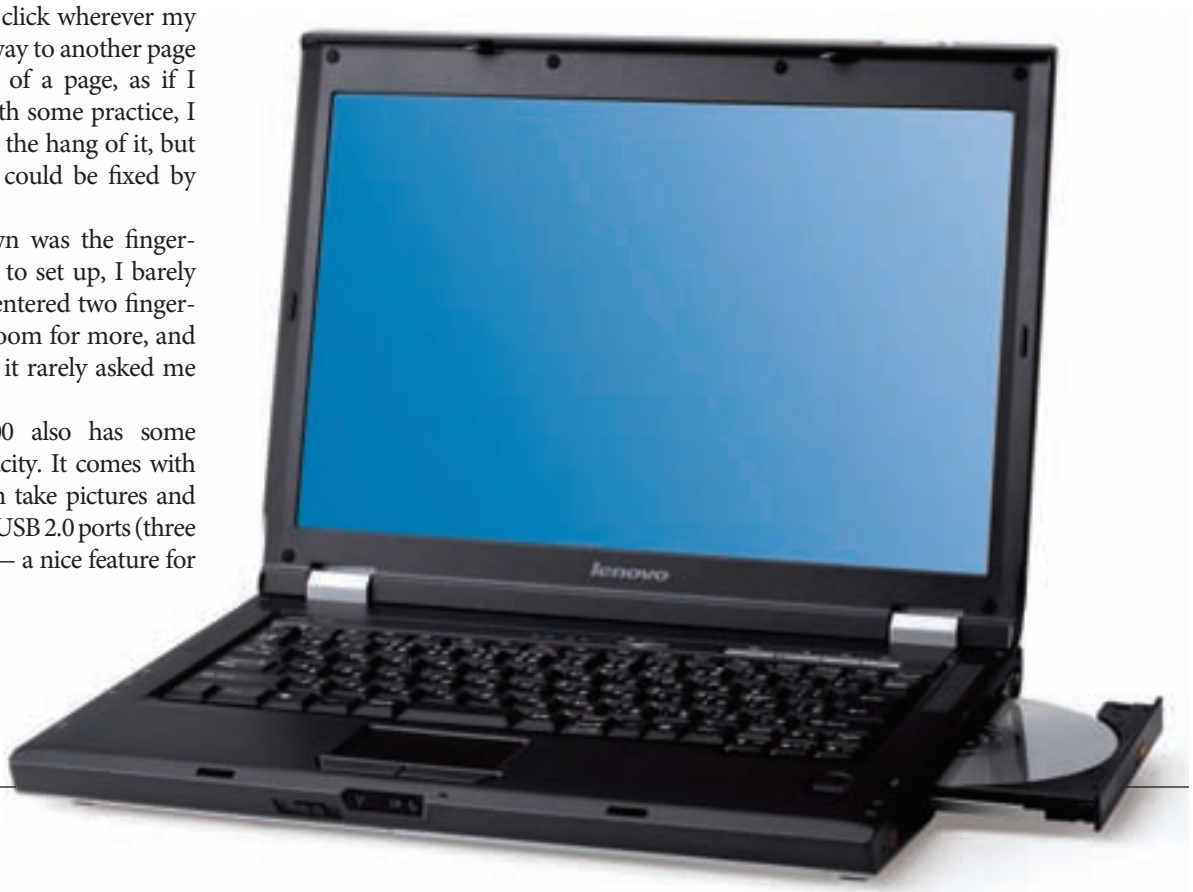

BY CORINE STOFLE
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<www.kingston.com>

Go-To Notebook

The **General Dynamics Itronix GoBook VR-2** semi-rugged notebook computer features an Intel Core 2 Duo processor T7300 at 2.0 GHz and a shock-mounted 80 GB 5400 rpm standard hard drive. It weighs 6.2 pounds, with a full-size, spill-resistant keyboard, 13.3-inch display, external antenna connections and built-in GPS. The notebook is housed in magnesium alloy and stands 2.24 x 12.05 x 10.24 inches.
<www.gd-itronix.com>

Harsh Times

Tangent developed the **Rugged Mini Fanless PC** for use in harsh environments. The PC's convection-based cooling design helps eliminate CPU and chassis fan failures, major sources of system failures in dirty environments. The PC measures 9.62 x 7.37 x 2.37 inches and weighs 4 pounds. Processor options include an Intel Celeron M up to 2.0 GHz, Intel Core Solo up to T1400 or Intel Core Duo up to T2600. The unit contains a 120 GB SATA/150 (maximum) hard drive and up to 2 GB DDR2 SDRAM memory.
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BY PAUL W. TAYLOR
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Putting People With People

Josh Culley, a writer who blogs at newprotest.org, had to decide whether to sell his aging recreational vehicle (RV) and put the money toward a down payment on a house or give it to an elderly couple who were left homeless by a windstorm in winter 2006.

It was a choice Josh and his wife didn't see coming.

The couple posted the Dodge motor home on craigslist, a free, centralized network of local classifieds and forums. After receiving a few offers for trade, as goes the barter-friendly culture of craigslist, the Culleys received an e-mail from the Washington Emergency Management Division. The note asked whether the Culleys would consider donating their RV to one of 14 families whose primary residence had been RVs until the wicked windstorm felled the trees that destroyed them.

"When it came down to it, it wasn't really a choice at all," wrote Culley in a blog entry about forgoing the $3,500 RV asking price for a tax receipt and the knowledge that they'd done the right thing for strangers who needed the RV.

"We found three RVs through craigslist," recalled Toney Raines, the division's human services manager, who says online trolling for the RVs was born of creativity and necessity. The extra RVs were necessary because the windstorm wasn't declared a national emergency, meaning none of the families got a trailer from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Though emergency managers are known for their scrappy resourcefulness, Raines conceded that he would've never thought of asking for RVs online, even five years ago. During a brainstorming session, a division staffer mentioned that Oregon officials did something similar. Point. Click. Type. They were on their way.

"It doesn't take anything to write three lines about what you need," Raines said, "and sometimes you get more than you could have hoped for." The new craigslist regulars at the division also furnished the RVs with washers and dryers, and furniture through freecycle.org, a site started four years ago to help keep stuff out of landfills.

Raines said the Freecycle Network has also helped to find things that can be helpful in the recovery process. "We have found everything from dog food to a guitar."

> "This proves that **people can unite** in meaningful ways that couldn't have been anticipated until somebody decided **to try something new.**"

Counting the three from craigslist, the division has now provided all 14 families with cleverly furnished and resourcefully procured RVs with the help of good-hearted folks. It echoes craigslist's founding ethic of helping one another in a friendly, social and trusting community way.

It also helps break government from conventional practices in which public agencies figure they must do everything themselves. Raines said online communities — along with civic and faith-based groups — have become an integral part of the division's outreach and recovery strategies.

In the perennial debate about whether the Internet isolates people in their basements or connects them, this proves that people can unite in meaningful ways that couldn't have been anticipated until somebody decided to try something new. GT

index

Jurisdictions/Agencies:
Berkeley, Calif. ... 28
Boston ... 20, 42
California High-Speed Rail Authority ... 32
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ... 16
Cincinnati ... 20
Colorado Springs, Colo., Police Department ... 20
Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency ... 16
Detroit ... 20
Fairmount, Pa. ... 16
Florida High Speed Rail Authority ... 32
Indiana ... 42
Long Beach, N.Y. ... 16
Los Angeles Police Department ... 42
Miami-Dade County, Fla. ... 50
Midwest High Speed Rail Association ... 32
Minneapolis ... 20
New York City Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications ... 42, 50
Oklahoma City Police Department ... 20
Richmond, Calif., Police Department ... 20
San Diego County ... 46
San Diego ... 46
San Francisco ... 10
Springfield, Mass., Police Department ... 20
Tennessee ... 42
Utah Department of Technology Services ... 38
Washington Emergency Management Division ... 58

Vendors:
Amtrak ... 32
Digg ... 12
Dutch Umbrella ... 16
Freeance Mobile ... 46
General Dynamics Itronix ... 56
Kingston Technology Company ... 56
Lenovo ... 54
Plus Vision Corp. ... 56
PowerPhone ... 42
RIM ... 46
Segway ... 16
Tangent ... 56

Advertisers Index
Accenture ... 17
Alcatel-Lucent ... 59
CDWG ... 30-31
Dell ... 47
EMC Corporation ... 7
ESRI ... 23
Gateway ... 2-3
Hewlett-Packard ... 9,25,60
Lagan Technologies ... 45
Motorola ... 5
NEC Display ... 13
Research In Motion ... 43
SunGard ... 15
Symantec ... 27
Toshiba ... 37
Twin Head ... 35
Verizon Wireless ... 53