

Alabama troopers issuing electronic tickets

By Phillip Rawls

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) -- Alabama state troopers are getting on the information highway.

Fifty state trooper cars are already equipped with laptop computers, scanners and printers that allow them to issue traffic tickets electronically, and the goal is to have the equipment in all 325 patrol cars within two years, state Public Safety Director Mike Coppage said Thursday.

The new equipment allows troopers to send their tickets to county courthouses electronically rather than delivering them in person. That means more time on the highway for the traditionally understaffed troopers, Coppage said.

Judy Van Luchene, division administrator of the federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, said the federal government began working with Alabama two years ago to develop the system, and Alabama is ahead of most states.

"With Alabama's shortage of resources, technology is an absolute requirement," she said.

Alabama has spent \$800,000 on the program, with most of that coming from the federal government.

Public safety officials demonstrated the system for the media Thursday.

Sgt. Ken Kelley sat in a patrol car with a laptop computer and driver's license scanner mounted to his right. He put an Alabama driver's license into the scanner and the computer quickly showed the picture of the person who was supposed to have the license. Kelley said that is a major safety factor for troopers patrolling alone on Alabama highways.

Then he used the laptop to enter the information for the traffic ticket and used a printer on the back floorboard to make a copy for the motorist. The ticket was transmitted instantly to a computer in Montgomery and then to the county courthouse.

In the past, Kelley would have filed out the ticket by hand and, at some point during the day, delivered his tickets to the county courthouse.

Seven county courthouses are already hooked into the system: Cleburne, Morgan, Madison, Mobile, Washington, Baldwin and Montgomery. Alabama Supreme Court Chief Justice Drayton Nabers, head of Alabama's court system, issued a statement saying the system will be used statewide in early 2005.

For now, state troopers issuing the e-citations still have to make periodic trips to the county courthouse to verify the accuracy of the tickets they issued, but public safety officials said they are working with the court system to get that requirement lifted.

Once e-citations are in use statewide, the next goal is have state troopers file accident investigation reports electronically and let them access criminal records from their laptop computers, officials said.

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