

Tickets receive a tech boost

By Jim Ellis, Staff Reporter

All Alabama State Troopers soon will have new equipment that will allow them to file tickets electronically from their cars, saving time and money and reducing errors, officials said.

A statewide push to equip law enforcement vehicles with inboard citation systems that will make writing tickets easier and more efficient is under way, according to Randy Helms, director of the state's Administrative Office of Courts. A bill passed in the last session of the Legislature makes the electronic tickets legal for use by all city and county law enforcement.

Helms said he had no estimates of the amount of time and money that the new electronic system will save. That is being researched now, he said.

The onboard system, called E-Citations, contains a laptop computer, scanner and printer. It allows law enforcement officers to electronically send traffic violations, such as speeding tickets, directly to the Administrative Office of Courts, Helms said. Currently, officers must hand-write the citation in quadruplicate and then deliver tickets within 72 hours to a court clerk, who then transcribes the citation into a computer.

Under the new system, troopers will give violators printouts of their tickets at the scene.

The state Department of Public Safety's Motor Carrier Safety Unit, which focuses on commercial vehicle enforcement, started a pilot program testing the electronic ticket system in 2003.

Since then, response has been "hugely positive," said Harry Kearley, commander of the Motor Carrier Safety Unit.

Kearley said that 55 troopers in his unit and 10 troopers that do normal patrols now have the system. All 400 state trooper automobiles should be equipped within the next six months, he said.

"We'll save countless man-hours, and data entry errors will be reduced dramatically."

To date, 10 patrol cars in the Tuscaloosa Police Department's fleet of 105 vehicles also have the system, Kearley said.

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