

## **Ticketing system boost for troopers**

**By Bob Lowery**

State trooper Sgt. Ken Kelley figures the new computerized ticketing system in his patrol car keeps him out of county courthouses and on the road four to five hours longer each week.

And that's a good thing for a state that's chronically short of state troopers.

"The biggest thing is not having to go to the courthouse every day or every other day and turning in the tickets," Kelley said during a demonstration of the e-ticketing system. "Mainly, we work out of town on the rural roads, rural county roads, interstates, roads everywhere. We're everywhere we can be."

The e-citation system, developed by Allen Parrish at the University of Alabama's CARE Research & Development Laboratory, was adopted by DPS two years ago in a pilot project in four counties that eventually was expanded to seven.

So far, the cost of the program has been roughly \$800,000, with 20 percent of it coming from state funds.

Col. Mike Coppage, director of state Department of Public Safety, has announced that the system is being expanded statewide to the Alabama Department of Transportation's Motor Carrier Safety Assistance Program.

"Probably the most important thing this will do is, it will act as a force multiplier for the Department of Public Safety state troopers who are on the road," Coppage said. "This will allow them to more quickly and more accurately enter data on a traffic citation and enter it into our computer, and then that data will electronically be transmitted to the court system.

"This is basically going to allow us better time management and better utilization of our troopers in the field," he said.

Mitch Parker of Auburn, who regularly travels Interstates 85 and 65 to Atmore to visit his mother, is a little more skeptical about the system.

"When it comes to enforcing traffic laws, it seems to me the state is disorganized," Parker said. "Would the information in the system be properly updated? My guess is, 'No.'"

But Mike Carroll, who works for the Alabama court system, notes the practicality of the system.

"For example, I am stopped for speeding and the trooper issues me a warning for speeding," he said. "Warnings are issued with this process and for the first time entered into this system, and I continue on. Fifty miles up the road, I'm stopped again for speeding by a different trooper who is now aware that this is my second stop for the day. No more warnings, but a ticket is then issued."

Trooper Capt. Harry Kearley, who commands the Motor Carrier Safety Unit, said troopers still will have to make some court appearances to swear to the authenticity of the tickets until court rules are changed.

"Hopefully ... with the implementation of this program we'll be able to transmit that information electronically to the court and the trooper will not have to show at each court appearance each time he writes a ticket in that county," he said.

Kearley said he does not believe it will require action by the Alabama Legislature to execute the change, but it could be resolved by a change of rules by the state Supreme Court.

With expansion, the new system will be carried in 50 trooper cruisers that monitor heavy truck traffic, Coppage said.

The goal is to have the computer system installed in every trooper car with an updated radio system within two years at a cost of about \$4 million, he said. There are 325 "road" troopers that perform routine patrols across the state, Coppage said. Those cars will not be outfitted with the new computer ticketing system until funds are available for updated radios.

The e-citation system includes a laptop computer mounted at an angle where the trooper can easily type on it while seated.

When making a traffic stop, the trooper scans in the driver's license. The license plate number also is entered.

The computer pulls up information about the driver's past violations and lists all vehicles owned by the driver and can then automatically launch searches of the databases of the Department of Corrections (prison records and photographs), outstanding warrants, protection orders, Board of Pardons and Paroles and jail records in Baldwin and/or Mobile counties.

If a ticket is warranted, it is printed out on a printer in the back seat and given to the driver. A copy of the ticket is forwarded electronically to the court system.

Coppage said the system would be available to other local law enforcement agencies as they become technologically equipped.

"It's going to be big boost for us, but also other police jurisdictions across the state that already have wireless capabilities," Coppage said.

Kelley, who is based in Montgomery, said the system works on driver's licenses for every state in the United States with the exception of Georgia.

"They have a specific encryption on the back of their license that only they have. Georgia has a different-style bar that this scan cannot read," he said.

Kearley said the first seven counties that entered the pilot program in 2003 were Baldwin, Cleburne, Madison, Mobile, Montgomery, Morgan and Washington.

"We've got initial approval for statewide implementation and we're looking forward to doing that," he said.

Kearley said software developed with the program would be offered free to city and county law enforcement agencies in Alabama.

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