

## **Bad news: You were caught speeding; Good news: Ticket won't take as long**

Tom Smith (Senior Staff Writer)

*NORTH ALABAMA* - Area law enforcement officers are going high-tech.

New technology in patrol cars is allowing officers to write citations faster.

"Which means they can be back on the streets patrolling," said Russellville Police Chief Chris Hargett.

Eight local agencies are equipped with computers, software and other equipment that allow them to write electronic citations, or "E-citations."

"The safety issue is a big factor," said Rogersville Police Chief Ty Barrett. "With the electronic equipment, an officer is not out of his car as long as he once was issuing a hand-written citation."

Tuscumbia Police Capt. Lori Jett said officers love the new program.

"They are able to access information quicker and issue the citation quicker. It's helping officers do their job better and be more efficient," she said.

The new technology is available to departments through a partnership among the Highway Safety Office, the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs and the University of Alabama.

"The object is for the officers to do more with less," said Eddie Russell, director of the North Alabama Highway Safety Office in Tuscumbia. "The program helps the officers save time and be on the streets more."

Russell said the funding for the computer, equipment and software is through the Department of Economic and Community Affairs with the University of Alabama doing the installation and training.

The system operates on laptop computers, using a wireless Internet or an air card, installed in patrol cars.

When an individual is pulled over, the officer swipes the driver's license and all of the information needed for the ticket appears on the computer screen, Russell said.

He said the ticket can then be electronically transmitted to the Administrative Office of Courts in Montgomery and eventually to municipal courts.

"An average traffic stop and issuance of a citation usually takes five to seven minutes. With this program, we should be able to do a citation within two to three minutes," Barrett said.

"It means we can be patrolling more instead of just sitting on the side of the road doing paperwork," Hargett added.

Russell said the Alabama Department of Public Safety has been using the E-citation system for some time.

"Locally, we have eight agencies now using this technology," Russell said. "Within the next couple of months, it should be available to six more. Hopefully, it will be available to every department in the area that wants it by next year."

Russell said departments who have used the program really like it.

"Every department could use more manpower, but unfortunately, an increase in the number of officers is probably not going to happen because of budget restraints," Russell said. "So, we have to use technology to help departments use their manpower more effectively.

"This is the future for law enforcement. It puts all the information right there (in front of the officer) at one time. It makes it quicker for the officer and for the offender," he said.

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