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## geoAMPS headed for AASHTO conference

Posted by Dan Liggett on March 29, 2013 at 2:31pm

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Tracking right of way, public assets and outdoor advertising along the nation's highway system poses significant challenges for state departments of transportation (DOT). Faced with limited staff and budgets, departments have attempted to meet these challenges with paper records or outdated databases and spreadsheets. That is a recipe for errors and inefficiencies, resulting in unnecessary expense of limited tax dollars.

Fortunately there are technological solutions available to help DOTs address these daunting tasks. Transportation officials can learn of these options at the meeting of the American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials (AASHTO) Subcommittee on Right of Way, Utilities and Outdoor Advertising scheduled April 14-16 at the Hyatt Regency in Savannah, Ga. Held in conjunction with this meeting is the National Alliance of Highway Beautification Agencies (NAHBA) Annual Conference on the Control of Outdoor Advertising.

Federal legislation to control outdoor advertising (ODA) was first passed in 1958. The law was an incentive to states to control ODA within 660 feet of the right of way along interstates. The Highway Beautification Act of 1965 (HBA) made it mandatory that states provide "effective control" of ODA along interstates and federal-aid primary routes within 660 feet of the right of way. A state that fails to do so can lose 10 percent of its annual apportionment of federal highway construction funds, which can amount to millions of dollars.

State laws prompted by HBA regulate virtually every aspect of ODA along controlled routes. Effective control must include size, lighting and spacing of ODA based upon "customary use" as determined by each state. These laws vary, resulting in inconsistent ODA controls from one state to the next. A constant, though, is that the effort to issue new ODA permits, renew permits and inventory billboards is a formidable one for DOTs that requires substantial public resources.

Improved technology offers effective solutions. It has been only recently that technological advances have been available to DOTs to help them meet ODA requirements. They are using surveying equipment with Global Positioning System (GPS) capabilities, laser pointers to measure sign dimensions, and databases capable of tracking ODA applications, permits, sign violations and field work.

geoAMPS, a developer of software solutions to manage land rights and infrastructure assets, will be in Savannah to offer information on its suite of products. rowAMPS helps organizations, including DOTs, manage right of way projects. rxrAMPS is greatly reduce the amount of time spent preparing notes.

Another issue for DOTs is recordkeeping of previous inquiries about ODA. Some states utilize a database, while some still rely on staff members' memory. Not having a centralized system of previous applications and inquiries for the same location causes unnecessary work which can easily be avoided. Location-specific searches can be accomplished quickly with Web-based software, accessing records not only on decisions made on previous inquiries and applications, but also the proximity of existing ODA.

Most states process renewals of existing permits. Renewals are usually processed annually, all of them at a designated time of year or individually on the anniversary of when the permit was originally approved. In either case, the process can cause significant challenges.

Technology can streamline the renewal process. dotAMPS supports an automated, comprehensive and flexible payment process. Once all information is input into the file for any particular sign, DOT staff can code the software to generate the essential permit renewal information – such as sign owner, history, cost, billing address and renewal date – automatically. The invoice can go out by mail or, if the agency requires it or the sign owner prefers, online. The software can also track payments. DOT staff time related to a renewal is limited to updating the permit information in the database. Providing the agency has been notified, changes to the file require minimal work.

Manpower and resources also are concerns DOTs share in conducting regular, accurate ODA inventories. With mobile devices and other tools, inspectors can check the signage seen from the roadway against the Web-based system, learning instantaneously whether a sign was erected according to required specifications. Unauthorized or illegal signs are identified. Using these tools, an inspector can inventory ODA along many miles of applicable highways in an efficient manner. Information for illegal signs, such as pictures and location, can be shared electronically with agency officials for possible enforcement action, including removal.

The capabilities to streamline ODA control is just one example of how new technology can help governments achieve fiscal austerity. Attendees to the April 14-16 session in Savannah, Ga., are invited to visit geoAMPS' booth to learn more about these opportunities.

Dan Liggett is Communications and Public Relations Manager for geoAMPS, a technology company located in the Columbus, Ohio, area that specializes in software solutions to manage land rights and infrastructure assets. For more information, call 614-389-4871 or visit [www.geoamps.com](http://www.geoamps.com).

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