

Title of Nomination: Utah Online Impound Vehicle System Project/System
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2003 NASCIO
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Utah Online Impound Vehicle System

1. Executive Summary

The Utah Online Impound Vehicle System (IVS) provides a centralized, web-accessible database of impounded vehicles in the State of Utah, and information is available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Several government agencies, law enforcement, private tow companies, and citizens need this timely access to this critical information.

In the past, this information was not readily shared across agencies, and thus many inadequacies had to be addressed:

- The DMV had a manual process for entry of this information into a stand-alone database.
- Law enforcement often had no visibility on the status or location of a vehicle.
- The Tax Commission and the Department of Transportation had a difficult time tracking the actual impound and release date of these vehicles for payment and auditing purposes.
- Tow companies could not verify the actual owner of the vehicle.
- The public did not have a definitive source for finding their vehicle once it had been impounded.

The online application allowed for efficiencies at every level. The DMV and Tax Commission no longer need to decipher handwritten faxes and complete the data entry and all other agencies, including law enforcement has access to this information. The tow company gains their efficiency when the Tax Commission realizes their submission immediately. Citizens now have an authoritative answer on the location of their vehicle.

The centralization of this information has also allowed for several additional benefits:

- The online Vehicle Impound System streamlines communication amongst all involved.
- The online Impound Vehicle System is an innovative and efficient resource for citizens who cannot locate their car.
- The online Impound Vehicle System provides accountability to tow companies.

Two methods were employed to allocate the funding for the development and maintenance of the application. An increase in statutory fees covered the cost of the initial development, and a small yearly fee to the tow companies covers the cost of system maintenance. Providing this application to several agencies at no cost gives them immediate return on their investment of time utilized to design the application.

2. Description of project, including length of time in operation.

Launched in July of 2002, the Impound Vehicle System (IVS) provides a centralized, web-accessible database of impounded vehicles in the State of Utah, and information is available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. This centralized system improves access to information and acts as a coordination point for all interested parties, including law enforcement, towing companies, citizens, and government agencies.

Government Agencies and Law Enforcement — The IVS system provides government agencies, responsible for the administrative oversight of vehicles impounded in the State of Utah, with dramatically improved access to vehicle impound information. There are several government agencies involved in this process: Utah Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), Utah State Tax Commission, Utah Department of Transportation, The Governor's Office and the Utah Department of Public Safety. With IVS, law enforcement has the ability to record information on impounded vehicles in a web-accessible database. The information is then available to all other parties for identification and adjudication purposes.

Towing Companies — Towing companies can determine the status of vehicles received in their lots by accessing the record(s) initiated by law enforcement in the web-accessible database. Towing companies can update a record with impound location and vehicle release date; they can also add any comments that may be of interest to law enforcement. In addition, towing companies have the ability to initiate an impound record (typically the responsibility of law enforcement) and record an authorization number received from law enforcement authorities.

Vehicle Owners (Citizens) — Vehicle owners may utilize the proposed system to search for their impounded vehicle and access information on vehicle release requirements and procedures. For those vehicles that require an impound fee to be paid before release, this application will soon allow credit card payment for these fees.

3. Significance to the improvement of the operation of government.

According to Utah law, a tow company must inform the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) when they impound a car at the state's request. This is initiated by law enforcement. Once the tow company has notified the DMV, they can begin to charge storage fees. Should the car remain impounded for over 30 days, it becomes property of the state, and the state assumes responsibility for the charges.

Previously, vehicle impound was a manual process with several operational inadequacies. They are as follows:

- Notifying the DMV was done via a handwritten fax form from the tow company. Then, the faxed information was entered into a database only accessible by the Tax Commission.
- Because there was not a central system for tracking the impound and release of these vehicles, it was difficult for law enforcement to know where the car had ended up. Law enforcement could not keep a record of the car once they had relinquished it to the tow company.
- The Tax Commission and the Department of Transportation had a difficult time tracking the actual impound and release date of these vehicles. Thus, the Tax Commission had a difficult time auditing tow companies to determine whether the tow companies were overcharging them for state impound fees. The Department of Transportation had a difficult time determining if fees being charged to citizens were within statute.
- Tow companies did not have a way to verify the actual owner of the vehicle.
- The public did not have a definitive source for finding their vehicle once it had been impounded. Often they ended up reporting their cars stolen because they could not be located. This was an additional burden on the state.

These communication difficulties left much opportunity for gained efficiencies at every level.

Government agency gained efficiencies – The DMV and Tax Commission no longer need to decipher handwritten faxes and complete the data entry. The tow company enters the information into the database. Law enforcement can simply look up an impound record by owner name and determine the location and reason for the impound, rather than trying to track down the right tow yard.

In addition, the Department of Transportation now has a very easy method of decertifying tow companies that do not meet state compliance. The Department of Transportation simply denies them access to the online system, and the tow company can no longer submit state impounds.

Tow yard gained efficiencies – The tow company gains their efficiency when the Tax Commission realizes their submission immediately. They can begin accruing payment much sooner. The system also gives tow yards a free inventory management system. They can track all their vehicles online, even those that are not state impound. They can track the vehicles location and status. The online database also provides real time vehicle and owner verification for the tow yard.

Citizen gained efficiencies – Citizens now have an authoritative answer on the location of their vehicle. Whether they call law enforcement or look online themselves, they can quickly find the location of their vehicle and retrieve it, rather than let the state attain possession.

4. Benefits realized by service recipients, taxpayers, agency, or state.

Citizens and state agencies realize benefits when information is centralized, communication is streamlined, and when convenient resources are made available to the public. Specific benefits are as follows:

The online Vehicle Impound System streamlines communication. Vehicle impoundment involves the DMV, the Tax Commission, law enforcement, tow companies, and vehicle owners, at the very least. A central, accessible system for tracking impounded vehicles has now been created to facilitate the exchange of information between interested parties. The DMV no longer needs to decipher handwritten faxes from the tow companies and then complete the data entry into a database only accessible by the Tax Commission. Tow companies can enter information directly into the IVS database. Law enforcement can likewise access impound vehicle records, making it easier to track the location and release of a vehicle once it has been relinquished to a tow yard.

The online Impound Vehicle System is an innovative and efficient resource for citizens who cannot locate their car. Citizens now have an authoritative source for finding their vehicle once it has been impounded. Whether they call law enforcement or look online themselves, they will quickly find and retrieve their vehicle, rather than let the state obtain possession.

The online Impound Vehicle System provides accountability to tow companies. The Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) now has a very easy method of decertifying tow companies that do not meet state compliance. UDOT simply denies non-compliant tow companies access to the online system; thus, tow companies can no longer submit state impounds. Furthermore, tow companies begin accruing payment much sooner with IVS because the Tax Commission realizes their submission immediately (as opposed to the 1-2 day paper process previously in operation). The system also gives tow yards a free inventory management system: they can track all their vehicles online, including a vehicle's location and status, regardless of whether or not a vehicle is a state impound. The online database also provides real time vehicle and owner verification for the tow yard.

These specific benefits stem, in part, from centralizing information. By creating a centralized, web-accessible database of impound vehicle information, IVS is able to provide citizens with an innovative and efficient resource, provide accountability to tow companies, and streamline communication between all interested parties.

5. Return on investment, short-term/ long-term payback (including summary calculations). Projects must exhibit measurable operational benefit.

Two methods were employed to allocate the funding for the development and maintenance of the application.

The development was supplemented by the passage of legislation to increase the fee for driving while intoxicated (DWI). After one year of collecting the increased fee, the cost of the system was easily covered and it is anticipated that this increase in fees will also cover any additional cost to expand or enhance the system.

Because this application has obvious benefits to the companies that will use it, it was possible to use an innovative, joint funding model, where government and private entities (tow companies) share the cost of the application's yearly maintenance and support. While the increased DWI fee covered the initial development costs, the tow companies pay a small, yearly subscription fee for access to the system that covers all maintenance and support.

In addition to the involved agencies having no real cost for development, there are several anticipated long-term savings:

- The cost of deciphering and entering the handwritten records into a database has been eliminated, which has resulted in cost savings for the Tax Commission of one full time employee per year.
- The de-certification of a tow company is much easier to initiate and enforce. There is no longer as much manual communication needed. The ease of performing audits on tow companies has been greatly improved. Rather than doing various labor-intensive tracking of paper forms, simple reports can be run to verify compliance. This decreased effort has resulted in cost savings for the Department of Transportation that allows them to do an increased number of audits. Rather than two or three audits a year, done on an as needed basis, all tow companies can be audited each year.