



DRIVEN BY DEMAND: HOW MONTANA'S MVD PUT PEOPLE FIRST

**MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
MOTOR VEHICLE DIVISION**

**AWARD CATEGORY:
OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY
JULY 2022 – MARCH 2025**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2020, while campaigning for Attorney General, Austin Knudsen heard a clear message from Montanans: **Fix the Motor Vehicle Division (MVD).**

The agency, housed under the Montana Department of Justice (DOJ), was handling both driver and vehicle services with MERLIN, an outdated system from 2007. Customers and staff were frustrated with the legacy system's slow and inflexible processes. They were tired of waiting months for an appointment only to wait in line once they got to the office.

Serving one of the country's most expansive states presents a few unique challenges. At more than 147,000 square miles, there's a lot of territory to cover. Nearly half of Montana's 1.1 million residents live in rural communities. Making services more accessible and convenient across such a large area was critical for MVD.

Determined to exceed customer expectations, MVD introduced the all-in-one Credentialing and Registration System (CARS). The modernization consisted of three phases: Online Scheduling, Driver Services, and Vehicle Services. Each phase has delivered major benefits to customers and staff, including expanded online services.

CARS represents more than a system replacement—it's a strategic response to the needs and expectations of Montanans. And it's just the beginning.

IDEA

What problem or opportunity does the project address?

In Montana, MVD directly handles driver services, while individual county treasurers' offices handle vehicle services. MVD's legacy system presented over a decade of problems, including lengthy wait times for customers, complex transactions, limited functionality, and excessive downtime. It did not serve the needs of Montanans, who often drove long distances to complete MVD transactions. Outdated hardware and a confusing website only exacerbated these issues.

Why does it matter?

As the fourth largest U.S. state by land mass, Montana faces unique challenges serving a largely rural population of 1.1 million people spread across over 147,000 square miles. MVD believes that in the 21st century, **people should not have to drive long distances in inclement weather for a task that can easily be completed online.** And if they do visit an office, the experience should be simple and efficient, ensuring their specific needs are met.



Maintaining MERLIN cost the agency \$3.9 million annually, and making necessary updates would have required sinking \$55 million into an outdated, unreliable system.

What makes it different?

MVD selected a vendor, gained legislative approval, and secured funding for the project in just six months. From there, the team kept its momentum. While many DMVs spend years modernizing a single component, MVD completed updates to all essential areas (i.e., scheduling, driver services, vehicle services, the website, and hardware) within three years.

What makes it universal?

CARS introduced user-friendly interfaces, automated kiosks, online services, and major operational upgrades that address common DMV challenges. These improvements also align with several of NASCIO's top priorities: Digital Government/Digital Services, Data Management and Analytics, Legacy Modernization, Budget/Cost Control, and Accessibility.

IMPLEMENTATION

What was the roadmap?

Upon taking office in 2021, the new Attorney General prioritized system modernization for driver and vehicle services. With the memory of an unsuccessful technology rollout for driver services fresh in everyone's mind and only six months left in the legislative session, the administration faced an uphill battle to find a solution, secure funding, and revise motor vehicle laws.



Integrate driver and vehicle services



Launch with minimal downtime



Expand online service availability



Optimize every step of the customer journey



Improve operational efficiency and staff workflow

MVD decided to take a holistic approach. The agency implemented an **all-in-one system** for scheduling, queuing, in-person transactions, and online self-service, while also replacing outdated hardware and overhauling a confusing website that draws nearly 1 million visits annually.

The project was completed in three phases:



ROLLOUT 1: SCHEDULING

July 11, 2022 – October 11, 2022



ROLLOUT 2: DRIVER SERVICES

August 1, 2022 – November 13, 2023



ROLLOUT 3: VEHICLE SERVICES

December 4, 2023 – March 17, 2025

Who was involved?

MVD leaders partnered with their software vendor to engage the following stakeholders through virtual and direct outreach:

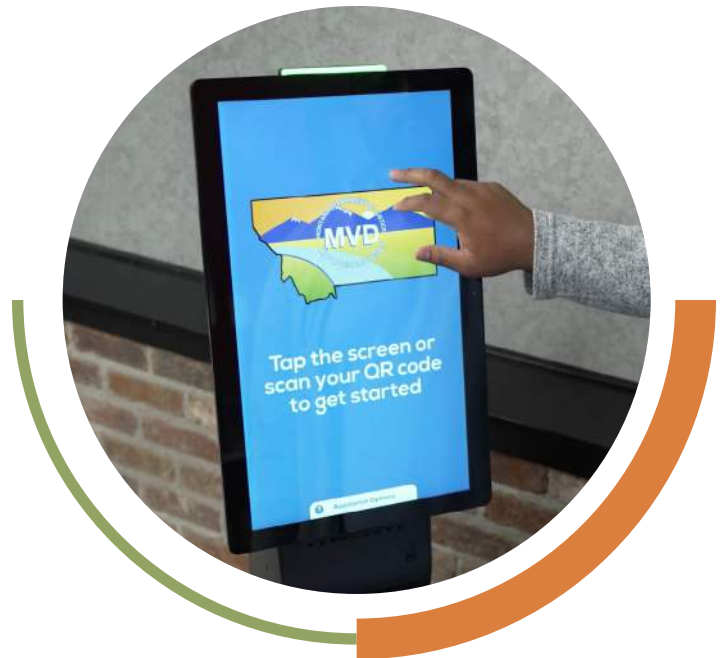
- Montana legislators
- 56 county treasurers' offices
- Community members
- Montana Automobile Dealers Association
- Third-party vendors

How did you do it?

The CARS project was a \$55 million, multi-year investment that modernized every aspect of driver and vehicle services. **MVD implemented a purpose-built, proven solution that had already been successfully deployed in almost two dozen DMVs across the country.** That decision reduced risk and startup time, allowing the team to hit the ground running and focus on configuring the system to Montana's specific needs.



Before tackling driver and vehicle services, MVD and the software vendor opted for a quick win: implementing a mobile-based online scheduling and queuing system. The new solution reduced no-shows and customer service calls while improving the flow at service centers. This laid a strong operational foundation for CARS and freed up time for MVD staff to focus on the next two phases of the project.



As customer needs and expectations evolved, a software-only upgrade to CARS would have fallen short. To fully modernize the system, MVD partnered with the vendor to select new hardware that met the new performance demands, ensuring seamless operation from day one.

Despite the scale of the change, each phase of the project was completed on time and on budget. Furthermore, customer service was only interrupted for one business day during the driver services rollout and two business days for vehicle services. The technical infrastructure enabled transformation through real-time data, seamless integration, and a scalable, future-ready foundation for ongoing modernization.



IMPACT

What did the project make better?

The project directly supported MVD's goal of enhancing the customer experience through modern offerings that cater to diverse needs. Key improvements include:



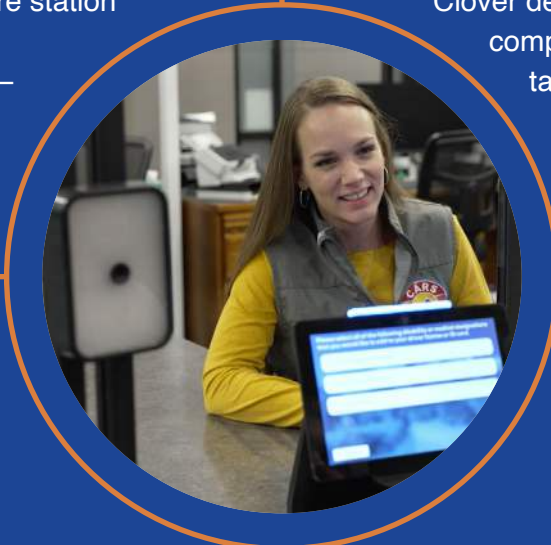
Increased Capacity & Faster Service

Automation of high-volume tasks has freed county partners to focus more on in-person customer service. This, combined with a new website for better navigation and accessibility, helps customers find what they need faster. Each examiner can complete more driver services transactions per day than the entire station could before. Most locations have next-day appointment availability—something previously unheard of in Montana!



Simplified In-Person Visits

All 48 MVD locations now have upgraded workstations that support full-service transactions at a single station, eliminating the need for customers to move between areas. The new hardware enables ID photo capture with state-of-the-art cameras, plus data entry and payment via Clover devices, replacing paper forms. ADA-compliant display screens, kiosks, and tablets have streamlined workflow and enhanced accessibility.



Expanded Online Self-Service

Before the upgrade, customers could complete only one type of transaction online. Now, over two-thirds of MVD services are available online. The mobile-friendly, ADA-compliant portal guides users step by step, and services requiring an in-person visit can still be initiated online. In the first year, over 100,000 driver services transactions were completed online. Montana car dealers can also manage accounts, renewals, and licensing fees directly through the portal.



Operational Enhancements

The new system has streamlined operations and reduced workload through real-time insights and better workload distribution. Document scanning reduces missing paperwork. These changes have improved employee onboarding, boosted morale, and cut reliance on temporary staff. CARS also enables seamless, secure data sharing across state agencies, helping reduce fraud in unemployment claims and voter registration.

How do you know?

Customer Convenience & Satisfaction

- 33% of customers complete transactions online
- 60% decrease in customer service calls
- 85% decrease in negative feedback

Efficiency & Time Savings

- 72% decrease in driver services appointment length: 22 minutes to less than 6 minutes
- 2x customers served daily per staff member
- 98% decrease in appointment wait time at most offices: 48 days to 1 day
- 99% decrease for written or driving test in larger offices: 79 days to 1 day
- 93% decrease in wait time for in-person license or ID renewal: 45 days to 3 days

Cost Savings

- \$3.9 million saved annually on legacy system maintenance
- \$86,983 saved monthly in credential printing—a 43% reduction
- \$1.9 million saved by eliminating temporary positions in the first year, with projected savings of \$2.5 million by the end of 2025
- \$1.1 million saved annually in shorter transaction times—a 60% improvement

Workforce & Operations

- \$1.25/hour raise offered to every MVD employee
- Previously 17%, now 2–4% monthly turnover and vacancy rate

What customers are saying.....

"That was the fastest I have ever been through a MVD and I've lived in 8 states."

"There were no lines and people backed up like I've previously experienced."

"I was in and out in 10 minutes! Awesome experience for a division of government!"

"Very impressed...I was finished even before my appointment time."

"Appreciated being able to fill out all required documents online."

"I barely sat down before my number was called. Easy to understand emails and texts and reminders."

"I left a little bummed that I won't be going back for another 7 years!"

"I love the new website, very informative and allowed me to get what I needed prepared."

What now?

CARS is a flexible, configurable platform designed for continuous improvement without major overhauls. Ongoing data collection will guide operational refinements and address emerging needs.

Currently, MVD is in the process of implementing mobile driver licenses to meet the legislative deadline of September 1, 2025. CARS makes this transition easy and cost-effective. Montana will also focus on expanding online services and increasing the use of kiosks to improve customer accessibility and convenience.

What MVD has accomplished so far is just the beginning—the possibilities for future innovations are limitless. By leveraging technology, MVD is better positioned to continuously adapt and meet Montana's evolving needs.