

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
HB 90: Continued Funding for the Montana Enhanced Registration and Licensing Information Network (MERLIN)

Background

The MERLIN Project – Montana Enhanced Registration and Licensing Information Network – is revolutionizing the way motor vehicle and driver-licensing services are provided in Montana. The Project is a substantial undertaking. Montana has more than 1.75 million titled vehicles. Each year the Motor Vehicle Division:

- titles 470,000 vehicles,
- registers 1 million vehicles, and
- licenses more than 162,000 drivers.

The Project reflects the Motor Vehicle Division's commitment to using technology to achieve three broad goals:

- improved customer service and convenience, especially by providing online access to services while reinforcing the security of confidential information;
- enhanced public safety, by providing law enforcement with timely vehicle and driver information that is more complete and accurate, helping prevent fraud and providing better access to nationwide stolen-vehicle information; and
- greater government efficiency, by sharing electronic information with other state and county agencies.

To accomplish this, the Motor Vehicle Division looked at practices in other states and adopted the best ideas for Montana's use. In late 2005, the division selected the team of BearingPoint/Archon Technologies to provide the technology to implement these best practices in Montana. When the process is completed in 2008, the services the Montana Motor Vehicle Division provides to drivers and law enforcement in our state will be among the best in the nation.

Unique Customer Accounts

Under the new system, all motor vehicle and driving record information is linked together in a consolidated database, eliminating the need to repeatedly re-enter the same information. Whenever an individual registers a vehicle, renews a driver license or reviews a driving record, all of the names, addresses and other relevant information connected to that individual's unique customer account are updated.

Online Services

Because of the MERLIN Project, many of the services relating to driving in Montana can now be accessed on the web. Since 2003, the Motor Vehicle Division has made the following services available through the State of Montana's website, mt.gov:

- Driver History Records Service – available to the public and to authorized businesses such as insurance agencies and trucking companies that routinely request large numbers of driving records. This service enables authorized users to instantly view driver record information. The records do not display the driver's Social Security number, address or any previous driver license numbers.
- Temporary Registration Permit Service – available to Montana vehicle dealers. By mid-2007, this service will also be available to financial institutions as well as vehicle services staff within the division and county treasurers' offices. Eventually, it will allow electronic lien filing where a vehicle is purchased, simplifying the process for customers, dealers and lending institutions.

- Vehicle Search – available to banks, credit unions, car dealerships, insurance companies and other businesses. The service allows authorized users to instantly search for and view vehicle record information including owner information, title history and registration information. By early 2007, this service also will be available to anyone who has a Montana driver license or state-issued identification card.

Other Services and Changes Underway

Over the next two years, the remaining pieces of the integrated computer software system will be introduced in Montana:

- Money management system – reports funds collected by county treasurers on behalf of MVD. This will allow the division to improve its financial auditing and oversight, and better monitor daily cash processing.
- Registration and titling software – will allow participating Montana vehicle dealerships, as well as MVD and county staff, to title and register vehicles online. In addition, this new service will let customers renew their vehicle registrations online.
- Driver licensing software – will allow MVD to better serve customers through improved fraud and identity theft protection, more efficient document handling and processing of license applications/renewals and exams, and timely access to complete driver history records.

The division is also introducing scheduled appointments at driver exam stations so customers no longer have to wait in line.

Support for MERLIN

The following business and government associations fully endorse the MERLIN project:

- Independent Insurance Agents of Montana
- Montana Association of Counties
- Montana Automobile Dealers Association
- Montana Bankers Association
- Montana County Treasurers Association
- Montana Credit Union Association
- Montana Motor Carriers Association

Funding

Initially approved by the 2003 Legislature, the Project is funded by a secure Montana Board of Investments' 10-year Inter-cap loan. The legislature approved \$22.5 million to fund Phase 1 of the project.

A financial summary of MERLIN Phase 2 funding includes:

- securing an additional Board of Investments loan for \$6 million;
- extending the existing title and lien fees for an additional five years, which would generate sufficient revenue to pay the debt service on both the current and additional loan; and
- continuing to pursue other grant funding to offset costs.