

GRATIS History

Sometime around 1998 the DOR Motor Vehicle Department approached the tax commissioners with the idea of installing a new computer data base for vehicle registrations. The idea was to modernize the system by installing a state-wide network. To entice the tax commissioners and counties into participating, the Motor Vehicle Department agreed to pay for all necessary equipment.

Labor Day weekend in September 1999 many counties participated as this new system, known as the Georgia Registration and Title Information System (GRATIS) went online. The following years the remaining counties participated in the program. All equipment needed was furnished by the state. Everything worked fairly well until the equipment started to show signs of aging.

Most all the old equipment was replaced by Hewlett Packard in 2008/2009 at the state's expense and everything seemed to be in order. The equipment was under the HP three year warranty and so maintenance was quickly forgotten. County tax offices since then have experienced nothing but problems in trying to get their equipment (which actually belongs to the state) repaired. The printers are the primary need as they undergo an extreme amount of work each day. The number of transactions and the negligence of any maintenance on the equipment is the cause for the failure of so many printers. The GRATIS equipment is proprietary and special configuration and only certain printers will work. Most smaller and more rural counties do not have experienced IT Departments or staff that can configure and install the equipment. If the system is to work correctly, the tax offices need equipment repaired or replaced and properly maintained.

December 19, 2011, a group of tax commissioners met with DOR Commissioner Doug MacGinnite and DOR staff at the Century Center office to discuss the situation of the GRATIS printers. The tax commissioners were informed that there would be no further support of the GRATIS equipment and no replacement due to lack of adequate funding by the state to DOR. Keep in mind, the registering and tagging of vehicles is a state requirement and function and that the tax commissioners merely act as agents of the Revenue Commissioner. The offices of the County Tax Commissioners spend the majority of their time handling motor vehicle registrations and related motor vehicle transactions. Practically every vehicle registered in Georgia (a few million) is handled in a local county tax commissioner's office.

Without the maintenance and replenishment of the GRATIS system and its equipment, the state will revert back to 159 counties doing it almost 159 ways. That will cause delays in depositing state revenues and accurately maintaining timely vehicle information for law enforcement and tag and title registration purposes.