



Geomatics gets government largesse

Funded projects to improve location-based tracking, decision-making, response times

By: Joaquim P. Menezes

CIO Government Review (04 Oct 2004)

Finding the proverbial needle in a haystack isn't that daunting if you can identify the location of the needle.

For many public sector organizations coast to coast that's going to be way easier to do – thanks to the federal decision to fund 29 crucial geo-spatial projects.

Federal government funding for the projects comes from GeoConnections, a national alliance dedicated to building a Canadian Geospatial Data Infrastructure (CGDI) that provides online access to Canada's geospatial databases, tools and services.

The government's \$3.35-million contribution is in addition to the \$4.5 million invested by other partners.

The projects are either being spearheaded by government organizations, or by "communities of practice" – users who share a common requirement for geospatial information.

These projects will "allow our communities and all Canadians to access, use and share geographic information," said Mauril Bélanger, Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, who announced the funding on Friday.

Better location-based tracking of people, environment, and natural resources is expected to pave the way for better and faster decisions and actions on economic, environmental and social issues.

This, in fact, is already happening with GeoConnections-sponsored projects in various Canadian provinces. For instance, paramedics in Alberta's Grand Prairie region are getting to accident victims faster thanks to a new computer-based digital mapping project funded by Sustainable Communities Initiative (SCI), a component program of GeoConnections.

In the past, the medics used as many as 12 different large folding paper maps produced by various city, county, municipal and industry sources to do their job. These maps covered the region's urban, rural, remote and wilderness areas – some 30 000 km² in total. Besides differing in scale and quality, they were also awkward to use.

Now as part of the new SCI initiative, digital maps, along with hardcopy map books, have been developed to speed up response times of ambulance paramedics.

In the project's initial phase TELUS Geomatics and the Grande Prairie GIS department created two map books of the response area in a GIS-ready format.

In phase two, the system will be completely digitized. Paramedics will simply enter an address on a rugged laptop computer in the ambulance and the location will appear onscreen, highlighted with a star. The Grand Prairie Regional Regional Emergency Service (EMS) will also be able to build a database of calls.

In the near future, Grande Prairie Regional EMS is planning to integrate a global positioning system into ambulances and to equip dispatchers to monitor vehicles on screen and in real time.