

# MetroGIS

*Helping government work more efficiently*

## 2004 Annual Report

The explosion of wireless telephone use is creating a real challenge for providers of emergency response services. The Twin Cities area's 911 system was established in the early 1980s based on wired phone service. The system was designed to immediately identify the phone number and location of incoming calls based on phone company customer records, updated daily.



dards, or requirements, for software vendors that will maximize the value of address data. Gordon Chinander, Metro 911 Board's GIS Coordinator, says that the working relationships and atmosphere of cooperation created by MetroGIS is making his job much easier.

Which leads me to perhaps the biggest single accomplishment of MetroGIS in 2004 – approval of a

But wireless technology, like the cell phones so many of us now depend on, is one of several new technologies that are creating the need for new ways to get critical information to 911 dispatchers. Wireless calls are not made from a fixed location. And not every 911 caller is in a position to give information verbally.

Only recently have the wireless carriers in the Twin Cities area begun delivering caller location information along with the voice on 911 calls. One solution being employed by carriers uses global positioning satellite technology built into handsets. This requires 911 dispatch centers to translate a longitude and latitude coordinate on to a map view that can be translated into a street address. *Welcome to the world of GIS!*

MetroGIS has formed a partnership with the Metropolitan 911 Board to help it address these and other challenges faced by the 27 emergency dispatch centers – known as public safety answering points (PSAPs) in the public safety world – in the face of rapidly changing communications technology. MetroGIS brings to the table nearly a decade of experience in building relationships across government jurisdictions and between the public and private sectors, as well as rich geospatial data resources created through cooperative data-sharing.

For example, a multi-agency working group, with staff support from MetroGIS, is exploring ways to make street centerline (address) data more usable for public emergency response purposes. The group is also attempting to devise a set of stan-

new parcel data-sharing agreement with all seven metropolitan area counties. This means that government and academic workers like Chinander, who may want regional parcel data, need to obtain only a single license for free, easy web-based access to the data. This is an incredible change from years past when many government GIS users had to negotiate with each county, often purchase the data and wait until it was delivered. And if they needed data that crossed county boundaries, the way each county created and displayed its parcel data was different from the others. The regional parcel dataset, a new and enhanced version of which MetroGIS released in January 2005, has changed all that.

"MetroGIS is way ahead of the curve, and has saved us a tremendous amount of time and money to get the information that we need," Chinander told MetroGIS recently. "It's helping us work a whole lot more efficiently." And isn't that exactly what taxpayers are asking from government?

Picture this: a 911 call comes into a dispatch center and, regardless of how the call was made, its location pops up immediately on a live map screen. The screen also shows the location of EMS responders best able to respond to that emergency. If a fire is involved, it shows if the building contains any hazardous materials.

This is the 911 Board's goal, and it's not too far off in the future. Many such goals have already been accomplished, thanks to the great work being done by this award-winning collaborative effort called MetroGIS.

## Access to geospatial data gets easier than ever

In a landmark achievement, MetroGIS in 2004 earned approval from all seven metropolitan counties for a new GIS parcel data-sharing agreement. The agreement means that GIS users need obtain only one license for access to parcel data from all seven counties.

Users may now download the license from the Internet and submit it to the Metropolitan Council, which is handling the licensing process for MetroGIS. In addition, access to parcel data is expanded from government and academic users in the seven-county area and its collar counties to government and academic users nationwide. The agreement ensures one-stop access to current parcel data produced by the counties via MetroGIS DataFinder continues through 2008.

Under the agreement, counties received funding for one-time programming needed to expand the parcel dataset from 25 to 55 attributes. Most of the new attributes in the parcel dataset relate to housing characteristics. In addition to the expanded attributes, the updated dataset features parcel points. The agreement also provides annual funding to the counties to compensate for data updates and other custodial responsibilities beyond their normal internal business needs.

### Major milestones in 2004

- ◆ **Creating mailing labels.** MetroGIS implemented its first regional geospatial data application - mailing labels. An advantage of the new regional GIS application is that it allows users to quickly and easily create mailing label sets that cross jurisdictional boundaries.
- ◆ **Assisting 911 dispatchers.** MetroGIS formed a partnership with the Metropolitan 911 Board. The Board's need for 911-compatible GIS address data is the impetus for efforts to develop a regional solution for address-related information needs that will satisfy a variety of users.

- ◆ **Accessing socioeconomic data.** MetroGIS posted a new online search tool that provides users with easy access to socioeconomic data about the Twin Cities area and Minnesota. Users may search by topical theme or by data source. The University of Minnesota Population Center maintains the currency of the data links, and recommends adding links to new data as they become available. This is the first time a non-government entity has accepted custodial responsibilities for a MetroGIS-endorsed common information need solution.
- ◆ **Preparing for emergencies.** The Emergency Preparedness Workgroup identified 105 GIS data layers to support Homeland Security efforts. Of those, 26 were identified as priority layers. The workgroup defined a process to verify and refine the initial datasets created through a joint effort of the counties, the Metropolitan Council and Metro 911 Board. Additionally, in close cooperation with the Governor's Council on Geographic Information, the workgroup participated in outreach efforts to both GIS and emergency management professionals to begin to bridge any gaps between the two in understanding needs and capabilities.
- ◆ **Classifying land uses.** Significant progress was made by MetroGIS to investigate design options for a regional existing land use dataset. A recommendation to proceed with a prototyping effort, which incorporates the American Planning Association's Land-Based Classification Standard, is being considered in 2005.
- ◆ **Serving as a model.** MetroGIS was selected by the Open Geospatial Consortium as the top U.S. example of local/regional data distribution architecture. MetroGIS was also selected for an international ESRI publication as the best North American example of a successful regional collaborative that is achieving the National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI) vision. ESRI is a major world provider of GIS software and technology.

[Read more](#) about the benefits of collaboration to address the common needs of MetroGIS stakeholders.

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