



November 12, 2009

The Honorable Chet Culver
Office of the Governor
State Capitol
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Des Moines, Iowa 50319
FAX (515) 281-6611

Nancy J. Richardson
Director, Iowa Department of Transportation
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Ames, Iowa 50010
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Dear Governor Culver and Director Richardson:

MAPPS (www.mapps.org) is a national association of private geospatial firms. Our 170+ member firms throughout the United States, including in Iowa, provide professional geospatial services to government at the federal, state and local, as well as international government levels, and the commercial market.

I am writing to express concern that the Iowa Department of Transportation has published a solicitation for a Roadway Digital Image Capture Equipment which includes Mobile LiDAR technology. This vehicle would be able to collect LiDAR data and imagery to be used in asset inventories and for surveying and mapping.

Our concern is based on the fact that such services are currently provided in the commercial market by professional surveying and mapping firms. There are more than a dozen Mobile LiDAR systems owned and operated by private surveying and mapping firms across the US, including some in states neighboring Iowa. These firms have invested heavily in this technology not only in capital, but training and development of their personnel as well. Many of these firms have provided mapping, surveying, and geospatial services to the Iowa Department of Transportation for many years. Services such as aerial surveying and mapping (commonly known as photogrammetry), aerial photography, land surveying, GIS, and aerial LiDAR have long been contracted to the private sector by the Iowa DoT.

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Historically, private firms have proven to be more cost-effective in providing surveying and mapping services than in-house DOT production. Mobile LiDAR and imaging services should be regarded in the same manner, and should be contracted as part of a QBS selection for professional services (see: <http://www.iaengr.org/QBS-GuideForPublicOwners.pdf>).

We believe the Iowa DOT's acquisition of a Mobile LiDAR system will result in government agency duplication of and unfair competition with the private sector. Contracting for such services, rather than purchasing equipment to perform such a commercial activity in-house, would be particularly advantageous at a time when private sector unemployment is so high and state budgets are so constrained. Historically, government agencies have contracted for such services and benefited from current technology, private sector innovation, the ability to access highly trained and skilled personnel, and the cost effectiveness that private sector competition brings to the marketplace. We are concerned that the Iowa DoT has underestimated the true total and life cycle cost of attempting to own and operate a Mobile LiDAR system. Such costs include the system, associated software, hiring or training of personnel, as well as overhead and tax revenue foregone all must be factored into the cost of owning and operating a system. Moreover, it is highly unlikely Iowa DoT has sufficient demand for such data to justify the cost of acquiring its own system. The cost to the taxpayer of low utilization rates for such a system will also be significant.

Moreover, we are concerned this acquisition may be in violation of Federal law, which encourages the use of the private sector for highway projects (See 23 USC 306). Since 1956, the national highway law required the Secretary of Transportation to, "wherever practicable, authorize the use of photogrammetric methods in mapping, and the utilization of commercial enterprise for such services". The law was amended in the National Highway System Act in 1995 to require the Secretary to "issue guidance to encourage States to utilize, to the maximum extent practicable, private sector sources for surveying and mapping services for projects".

In an economy where States are finding it difficult to fund basic services and face financial difficulties due to high unemployment rates and reduced tax revenues, it does not appear wise or prudent to waste taxpayers' money on equipment for government operation of an activity when there are private firms that already have such equipment and can be utilized through a competitive procurement process.

We respectfully urge you to cancel the bid solicitation for a Mobile LiDAR system and contract to the private sector for Mobile LiDAR services from qualified private practice professional firms.

Sincerely,



John M. Palatiello
Executive Director