



Houston Court Computer to 'Go Live' Amid Controversy

Amid growing controversy over new computer system, the City of Houston will again try to "Go Live" with its delay plagued Traffic Ticket Court computer system. Critics claim new system is not needed, poorly planned and a huge waste of tax dollars.

Houston, TX ([PRWEB](#)) January 2, 2006 -- If all goes well, the City of Houston's traffic ticket courts should have a new computer system by Tuesday. In a memorandum dated December 7, 2005, Richard Lewis, the Acting Director and Chief Clerk of the City of Houston Municipal Courts, announced that the City of Houston Municipal Courts new computer system will "Go Live" on January 3, 2006. The new computer system is called ICMS which stands for Integrated Case Management System.

The new ICMS computer system was originally approved in April 2003 with Houston City Council's approval of approximately \$20 million for the new system to replace the current computer system. According to the City of Houston's own web site, the "planning phase" of the project was completed in September 2003 and the "design phase" was completed in December 2003. Current estimates now put the costs of the ICMS at well over \$26 million and climbing.

For two full years since the "design phase" was completed, the new system has repeatedly failed to come on line. The ICMS was originally scheduled to go live in February of 2005 but failed to do so. In 2005, the City of Houston scheduled the new computer system to go live on at least three different occasions. On all three occasions the City of Houston Municipal Courts were closed for periods of one or two weeks at a time. But still the new computer system has not gone live.

Whether the new system goes live this time remains to be seen. Even if it does, critics claim the new computer system as designed has many shortcomings that the current computer system does not have. The new system has been proudly touted by the City as being "paperless". This poses several logistical problems in the courtroom that the planners have not taken into consideration.

For instance, there are no computer monitors on which Houston Police officers can review their tickets in the courtroom. Under the old system, the officers would come in and look at their paper tickets which were attached to the complaints to determine if they still recalled the facts of a particular case being called for trial. If the officer recalled the case, he would advise the prosecutor that he was "ready" for trial. If he did not recall the facts of the case, he would advise the prosecutor that he was "not ready" for trial.

When the new computer system goes paperless, traffic tickets will be electronically scanned and stored in the new computer system. However, the police officers will have no computer monitors in any of the courtrooms on which to review their tickets. Over 1200 cases a day are set for jury trial and there is no way for police officers to review a single one of these tickets in any of the courtrooms.

The police will not be the only ones with computer monitor problems created by the "paperless" system. There will only be two computer monitors in each courtroom for dozens of attorneys and hundreds of defendants to share to view hundreds of complaints. "To say the least, it should be very chaotic as 100 or more people try to share two computer screens to see the pleadings in their cases," says Houston traffic ticket lawyer Kameron Searle. Searle has defended traffic tickets at the City of Houston for over ten years and is a former City of Houston prosecutor.



In an effort to reduce the number of clerks in each of the courtrooms, the City of Houston is switching a large part of the court's clerical work over to the Judges in each courtroom. Under the new ICMS computer system, Judges will be required to enter judgements on a computer keyboard for each of the hundreds of cases before them. This will leave the judges with no time to try jury trials. Instead of trying cases, Judges will spend most of their trial day entering data on their computers, work which was previously done by clerks.

There also seems to be a general consensus among Municipal Court employees that the new computer system will be far more complicated than the current computer system. They point to numerous extra steps that the new computer system will require for each individual operation that the current system does not require. Because of these many extra procedural steps for each task performed, the new system will not work nearly as fast as the current computer system.

Instead of speeding up business at the courts as promised when the new computer system was proposed, critics say these shortcomings may bring the City of Houston Municipal Courts to a screeching halt. Instead of speeding up the courts, every day thousands of Houstonians will be spending much more time standing in line and sitting in court.

The current computer system, known as RHUMBA, was custom built for the City of Houston Municipal Courts over many years and was modified and adapted for each new change that came along. "The City of Houston is spending \$26 million to replace a computer system that works just fine," says Houston traffic ticket attorney Kameron Searle. For over a decade, RHUMBA has effectively handled all pending cases and about 1.2 million new cases each year. Along with many others, Searle believes the city is trading a proven piece of technology that works very well for an unknown quantity.

The current computer system (RHUMBA) was turned off two weeks ago on the evening of December 16, 2005. And the City of Houston Municipal Courts have not held any trials since then. On December 27 through December 30, 2005, the municipal court clerks conducted a rehearsal on the new system called "Mock Live." Scrambling to have the new computer system go live on January 3, 2006, clerks have been advised that they may even have to come in to work on Saturday December 31, 2005 (New Year's Eve) and on January 2, 2006 which is an official city holiday.

All eyes will be on the new ICMS computer system on Tuesday, January 3, 2006. Will the lines be shorter or longer? Will Houstonians be spending less time or more time in Court? Was the \$26 million spent wisely? Where did all that money go? Will the new computer system actually "Go Live" this time?

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