

Policy Statements for Statewide GIS Activities

**Information Technology Policy Council
GIS Committee**

July 21, 1995

ADOPTED - July 21, 1995 ITPC Meeting

The purpose of the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Committee of the Information Technology Policy Council is to help provide policy direction for the rapid expansion of GIS activity within Georgia's state, local, and federal government agencies, and for interested parties in the private sector. During the committee meetings, the members received briefings and/or written information from the major GIS units within Georgia state government agencies. Based upon this information, the Committee has established the following goals for statewide GIS policies:

- Reduce the wasteful, redundant collection of GIS data,
- Foster joint data acquisition efforts meeting the needs of multiple agencies,

- Provide an effective means for state agencies to share one another's GIS data,
- Develop statewide standards for GIS data collection and documentation,
- Document fully all current GIS data available across the state,
- Allow state agencies with existing GIS capabilities to adopt the technology when it is appropriate and cost-effective.

To further these goals, the Committee recommends the following policy statements for adoption by the council.

A. Need for a State GIS Data Clearinghouse

Background: Geographic information systems (GIS) technology is rapidly spreading through multiple agencies of Georgia state government. Although the state spend millions of dollars each year on the acquisition of new GIS data, it is almost impossible for state agencies to share GIS data among themselves, resulting in the costly, uncoordinated collection of redundant data. Each agency is forced to build a full set of statewide databases, since access to other agencies' databases is costly, time-consuming, and very slow. Exchange of GIS data is made yet more difficult since each agency creates its own internal standards for data formats and data documentation. At the same time, the GIS units of state agencies are being overwhelmed by GIS data requests from local, state, and federal governments, as well as public utilities and private businesses. Some of these requests can be met, but each GIS unit must necessarily give higher priority to the internal mandates of its agency, than to requests from outside organizations.

Policy Statement: The State of Georgia should develop a State GIS Data Clearinghouse. The Clearinghouse will (a) obtain GIS data from the federal government, GIS units of state government, and institutions of the University System; (b) clean, document, and format the information; (c) publish it on the Internet for access by state government agencies and other authorized parties; (d) assist in the acquisition of new, statewide GIS data; (e) aid the development of statewide standards for GIS data; and (f) develop a statewide locator service and spatial data catalog consistent with established GIS metadata standards.

B. Location of the State GIS Data Clearinghouse

Background: There are a number of potential administrative locations for the clearinghouse. These include the development of a new state agency, the designation of an existing state agency, and the use of resources of the University System. A new state agency is not recommended because of the high startup and maintenance costs. Several existing state agencies could house the Clearinghouse, but it would then be very difficult for the Clearinghouse to balance its statewide mission and its role within a specific agency. A University System location has a number of advantages. First, the University System has decades of GIS experience at both the University of Georgia and the Georgia Institute of Technology. Second, these two schools already have a significant portion of the hardware, software, data, and personnel that will be required to establish the Clearinghouse. Third, the University System already maintains a statewide data network that connects several of the existing state agency GIS units. Finally, over the next three years the University System will be investing 1.5 million dollars of funding for the two schools to expand GIS teaching, research, and service activity, and to develop a University System GIS data repository. The State GIS Clearinghouse could be established more quickly, and at a lower cost if it is developed in parallel with this substantial, new University System initiative.

Policy Statement: The State should enter an agreement with the University System of Georgia to sponsor a State GIS Data Clearinghouse. Initial development of the Clearinghouse would be accomplished through a partnership of the Georgia Institute of Technology and the University of Georgia, with other University System institutions participating as they develop internal GIS expertise.

C. Statewide coordination of GIS activity

Background: At present, the state of Georgia has no strategic plan for GIS activities, and no mechanism for coordinated, multi-agency GIS planning. The Information Technology Policy Council can establish an overall policy framework for GIS activities, but it cannot accomplish the detailed, ongoing technical planning that is necessary for successful statewide coordination. Nor could the Information Technology Policy Council administer the operational development of the State GIS Data Clearinghouse. The state needs a single, lead agency for GIS operational coordination, planning and oversight.

Policy Statement: The Office of Planning and Budget should be designated the lead agency for statewide GIS planning and coordination. As part of the mandate, the Office of Planning and Budget should directly oversee development of the State GIS Data Clearinghouse.

D. Statewide GIS Advisory Committee

Background: The success of coordinated, statewide GIS planning will depend on the broadest possible participation of all agencies that are currently conducting GIS activities, all agencies that are considering future GIS implementation, other interested parties in both the public and private sectors. In order to ensure that every interested agency has a voice in GIS activities, a formal mechanism for extensive agency participation must be established.

Policy Statement: The Information Technology Policy Council should appoint a statewide GIS Advisory Committee. Every interested agency in state government should have one representative on the Committee. In addition, the Information Technology Policy Council should appoint several members to represent interested parties in the private sector, such as public utilities. The primary task of the Committee will be to provide the Information Technology Policy Council with general advice on the strategic, policy, and financial issues related to statewide GIS activities.

E. GIS Technical Working Groups

Background: Many GIS planning and policy decisions involve highly technical questions related to GIS hardware and software capabilities, spatial data management, and alternate technologies for new data acquisition. These questions can only be addressed through extensive study and discussions conducted by informed GIS technical experts. In addition to the broad policy advice to be offered by the GIS Advisory Committee, there is a strong need for a means to assemble and forward the collective recommendations of the State's GIS technical experts.

Policy Statement: The Information Technology Policy Council should designate a pool of Georgia's best GIS technical experts from state government, local government, federal government, the University System and the private sector. As individual technical issues arise, wither the Council of the Advisory Committee may appoint technical working groups consisting of experts drawn from the pool. Each working group will be appointed for a specific period of time, and report to either the Information Technology Policy Council or the Statewide GIS Advisory Committee.

F. Funding for the acquisition of new statewide GIS data

Background: At present, each GIS unit in state government collects GIS data only to meet its internal agency mandates. With slightly modified collection procedures, however, many types of GIS data could be very useful to multiple agencies. There are other types of GIS data that are too expensive for any one agency to acquire (such as a statewide, high-accuracy basemap), but could be affordable through a multi-agency effort.

Policy Statement: The State of Georgia should commit consistent, annual funding for the coordinated acquisition of statewide GIS data needed by multiple agencies. These funds may be expended by the State alone, or by the State acting in partnership with federal agencies, local agencies, or the private sector. Data types and priorities will be recommended by the Information Technology Policy Council.
