

Tampa Bay Times



WINNER OF 12 PULITZER PRIZES

MOTORIST DATABASE TO GET REPAIRS STARTING THIS MONTH



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Brian Alcover, 15, of Tampa, takes the eye exam for his learner's permit with his father, Rolando, at the Hillsborough County Tax Collectors office in Tampa on Tuesday. Tax Collector Doug Belden has complained that a state database his office relies on keeps crashing, turning away customers.. [Will Vragovi | Tampa Bay Times]

State officials are offering one immediate fix and two longer term repairs to prevent crashes of a database used for the renewal of driver's licenses and the registrations of cars and trucks.

Thousands of motorists have been turned away by the state's tax collectors, elected county officials who issue tags and licenses, because of chronic breakdowns that began in April with the database, which stores millions of driving records.

On Friday, Florida's Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles announced two backup servers will be installed within the next month to prevent future crashes. Early next year, new storage with a faster response time will be installed. By June, a new hardware replacement server for the entire system will be completed.

The highway safety agency released the timeline of fixes after tax collectors demanded to know more about the state's plan to fix the system. Frustration among tax collectors has been growing. Offices say the system crashes, on average, every four days.

The Legislature allocated \$6.5 million toward a new system for the DHSMV, which has partnered with the Agency for State Technology

Kirk Sexton, the information technology director for the Hillsborough County's Tax Collector, said the state's announcement that it will install not one but two new servers to improve performance was reassuring.

"That's pretty much exactly what we were asking for so I take that as a very positive sign," he said. "I'm really hoping this will alleviate the short-term performance problem."

Since a weekend crash that continued for one hour on Monday, Sexton said Hillsborough's intranet was down for about three hours Thursday, which could have inconvenienced customers.

Pinellas County Tax Collector Diane Nelson said her office hasn't experienced any issues within the last few days.

"We've seen a difference in the changes they've made in the system," she said.

Nelson said the system overhaul is long overdue. She called the state's timeline reasonable.

"If we get this done by June 2017, I'll be a happy camper," she said. "When you wait so long to fix something it won't be done overnight."

Hillsborough County Tax Collector Doug Belden said Terry Rhodes, the executive director for DHSMV, inherited the aging system.

Belden said he hoped the Agency for State Technology, which is assisting DHSMV with the system fixes, knows this is a top priority. A spokeswoman for AST said 25 people are working long hours to fix outages.

"I want a time-certain date where we believe stability and performance has been achieved," Belden said. "We cannot continue to infuriate people. Our core competency is customer service, period."

Motorist database to get repairs starting this month

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