



## Case Study: Enforcing Policies for Police Department Data Terminals

Staunton, Virginia, a city of 25,000 in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, was spared the fighting during the Civil War and thus boasts one of the area's largest collections of pre-Civil War architecture. This and Staunton's beautiful surroundings between the Blue Ridge and Appalachian mountains in the western part of the state make it a prime tourist destination as well as a pleasant place to live.

Like most small cities, Staunton strives to provide big-city community services on a budget, and the 45-member police force is no exception. When the department wanted to upgrade to mobile data terminals in police vehicles last year, the city turned to NeoAccel for part of the solution.

### Going Mobile

In the spring of 2006, Staunton chief technical officer Kurt Plowman began looking for a way to implement a big-city mobile data application at the local police department. In large cities, police cruisers have built-in laptop computers that provide wireless data connections to the department's servers, giving officers immediate access to driver's license data and other important information whenever they make stops. "We wanted to deploy mobile terminals so our officers don't have to get on the radio and wait for the dispatcher to get them information," said Kurt Plowman.

Many police departments use an application called Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD), which is typically implemented in police vehicles on a Panasonic ToughBook laptop. The application is in continuous communications with a corresponding server in the police department's data center via a cellular network.

### Search for a Solution

Plowman and his 5-person team knew that the CAD application would do the job, but they weren't so sure about the solution many other departments used to provide the remote connection. The popular remote access product uses a client-based system that involves manual installation and configuration on each terminal, but it is relatively expensive. The remote access solution's main advantage is that it maintains the user's IP address when switching from one network to another.

"That was overkill for us," says Plowman. "What we wanted was a solution where we didn't have to mess with client configurations. We wanted the software to come up when the officer turns on the laptop in the car, and automatically connects and works. We wanted something fast, simple, and reliable so the officer doesn't have to think about connecting to the network as he or she is driving down the road."

Research on the mobile application infrastructure began in the spring of 2006 and Plowman spoke to many remote access solution vendors in May at the Interop show in Las Vegas that year. "NeoAccel sounded like they knew a lot more about remote access performance than anyone else," he says. "I liked the security, the control, and the policy enforcement that SSL VPN-Plus provided with the fat client implementation, along with the overall efficiency of the connection."

While the CAD application has built-in security, Plowman wanted an additional layer of protection. "I wanted to make sure that laptop users complied with my network security policies. For example, if a user needed Internet access they would come into the network and then be directed out through our network firewall. I didn't want anyone to have unfiltered Internet access from a laptop in a remote location."



Another consideration Plowman's team wanted to validate during the test phase was the remote link's performance. Since Staunton is in a rural area, the city's cellular service provider didn't yet offer high-speed data services, and Plowman's team wanted a solution that was as fast and efficient as possible to ensure speedy response times when officers requested data. "SSL VPN-Plus exceeded our expectations in the performance category," says Plowman.

### **Improving Remote Access Performance**

After passing the test phase with flying colors, the mobile police data solution went live in the first four of the department's vehicles in February 2007. Plowman expects full implementation by the end of summer. Since day one, the SSL VPN connection has been fast, secure, and reliable. In fact, Plowman has since moved other remote network users to the SSL VPN-Plus connection.

"Some of our administrative employees work from remote locations or from home, and they had been using a PPTP connection supplied with our firewall," he says. "When we saw how much easier it was to administer the SSL VPN-Plus connection and how good its performance was, we moved those users over as well." Since then, these users report that their connection speeds are much better with SSL VPN-Plus, and Plowman says, "The SSL VPN is a whole lot easier to maintain than having to configure the PP2P connections via clients on each person's laptop."

Throughout these changes, NeoAccel has provided strong products with outstanding support. "NeoAccel has really gone above and beyond the call," says Plowman. "They have quickly resolved the few issues we have had – mostly related to user error and training – and they have always been available to walk me or my staff through any issues."

Today, the City of Staunton's police department has state-of-the-art data communications applications in its vehicles, and with NeoAccel's SSL VPN-Plus, Kurt Plowman and his team can rest assured that the remote data connections are secure, fast, and reliable.