

# LAW and ORDER

## Project Car 54

by Kevin Gordon

Not that long ago a fully equipped cruiser was one with a radio, roof lights, siren, and a shotgun. For years the shotgun was mounted primarily in the front passenger area, moved only years later due to concerns of contact with the air bags. Now your cruiser may be equipped with front and rear antenna radar, overhead lights, take down lights, rear strobes, siren, PA, lap top computer, video camera, a GPS unit, cell phone, and one or more radios.

In addition to competing for what little extra space you have, each one of those units requires your attention to operate. Attention that is no longer on the road or your surroundings.

Imagine if you could drive your vehicle and operate all that equipment by voice command. Almost complete hands-free and eyes-free operation of all the devices in your car. Pursuing a vehicle while talking to dispatch and changing frequencies as you drive through other jurisdictions, all without taking your eyes off the road or hands off the steering wheel. This cruiser of the future is here now thanks to a project started in 1996.

Project 54 is a joint project between the University of New Hampshire and the New Hampshire Department of Safety and is supported by the US Department of Justice and New Hampshire Senator Judd Gregg.

According to Senator Gregg, the system is "designed so that the trooper can drive his car and be looking out the window and communicate with his computer and have instant response with the computer." Since 1996, faculty and approximately 100 students have contributed to bits and pieces of the project at the Consolidated Advanced Technologies Laboratory (CATLab) of the University.

Illustrating the sense of humor of those involved, the project is named Project 54 after the old television comedy "Car 54, where are you?" Many of you will remember Car 54 as the 1961 comedy starring Fred Gwynne and Joe Ross better known as Officers Muldoon and Toody. Many don't realize that Car 54 is recognized as the first television police comedy. For you younger officers, do a Google search, you'll find it!

Project 54's original goals were two fold: first, to improve the ability to collect and exchange data and second, to integrate the controls of the various equipment in a cruiser. The project is summed up best by "bringing it all together with the sound of your voice."

As any officer knows, cruiser based devices are stand alone, not part of a system. Project 54's primary purpose was to integrate all the devices into one common control system and application. A standard PC running windows with touch screen controls all devices in the squad. The system consists of a lap top with a touch screen which can be used to control all the functions or, touching a "talk" button on the steering wheel, allows all items to be voice controlled. All equipment can also be operated the old fashioned way.

The system takes up no trunk space and it cleans up the driver's area creating a safer "office" area. Simple voice commands control all such as "lights on," "front antenna," "front strobes off," and "video on." The command of "pursuit" can activate all lights, sirens, and the video. Typing isn't required to run vehicle or driver checks or other data queries.

Voice commands allow these while the cruiser is still on the move without the help of a dispatcher. The computer will even read the info back to you so you can keep you eyes on the road. If you need to change radio frequencies, just say the name of the town and the radio goes to that frequency just as "home" brings you to a predetermined home channel.

Project 54 is presently in all New Hampshire State Police vehicles as well as 35 other NH cars and additional vehicles across the country. Some systems have been used in vehicles everyday since 2001. Project leaders expect to have the system in over 500 cars and SUVs by the end of 2005.

As with other computer projects, Project 54 is divided into two parts: software and hardware. Software is about \$500 per department and can be installed by any authorized installer. Hardware is all off-the-shelf and existing department hardware can often be used. The system can be installed in any car and is presently in Chevrolet, Dodge, and Ford cars and trucks. It can be installed in a new cruiser or existing vehicle.

The use of off-the-shelf components keeps the costs down and some manufacturers are now building interfaces for Project 54 into their equipment so future costs will most likely come down. An agency that already uses MDTs or laptops could incorporate Project 54 for around \$1000 a car. This is not something promised for the future. It is here, right now. In the works from Project 54 is an Internet based system that will allow agencies to use their present radio equipment and access other agencies radio links.

*Kevin Gordon spent 25 years in law enforcement and retired as a chief of police. He can be reached at [Kevin@KGordon.com](mailto:Kevin@KGordon.com).*

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