

YOUR JOURNEY, YOUR WAY:

*CHOICES, CONNECTIONS AND A GUIDE TO THE SWEET
PATH IN GOVERNMENT PORTAL MODERNIZATION*



PREPARING FOR THE JOURNEY

*You must take the 'A' train
to go to Sugar Hill way up in Harlem.*

*If you miss the 'A' train
you'll find you've missed the quickest way to Harlem.*

Hurry, get on, now it's coming.

Listen to those rails a thrumming.

All board! Get on the 'A' train.

Soon you will be on Sugar Hill in Harlem.

- Duke Ellington, 1941

Subway commuters make navigating an underground labyrinth that connects the city in ways that are not obvious at street-level easy, while tourists tend to hesitate. For the less experienced, maps and guides — even iPhone applications — help us figure out the best routes from point A to point B. For most journeys, no single 'A' train can take you from where you are to where you want to go. The value and trick are in making connections and combinations with your destination in mind.

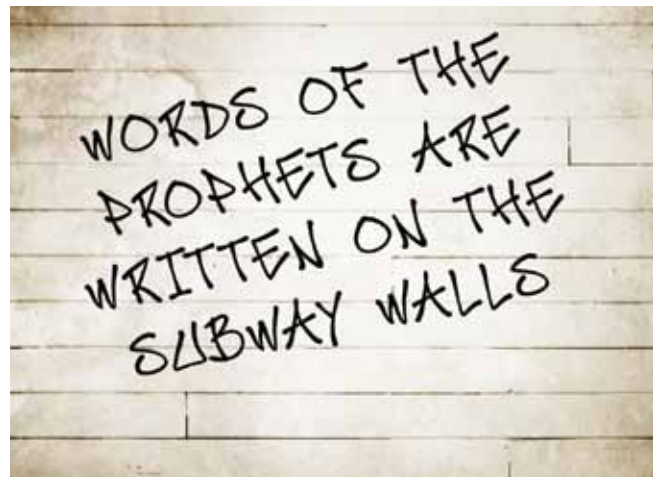
Video gamers call this the “sweet path.” It isn't necessarily singular or uniform, and in most cases it is in a structure similar to a subway map where your choices either keep you near the sweet path, or divert you away from it. The closer you stay to the sweet path, the greater the range of choices you maintain for later in the game — or journey. Conversely, veer away from the sweet path and your choices narrow to very few options.

The story is the same when it comes to the hard work of government modernization, particularly as public agencies seek to extend the value of existing systems and data to meet the expectations of a public that are being fundamentally reshaped (over and over again) by the Internet.

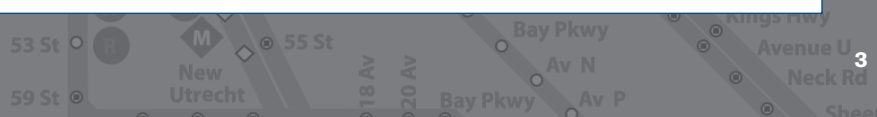
The good news is that, like subway commuters, there is a core contingent of e-government veterans who have seen most of this before, and bring those vital learnings with them to apply to the next generation of challenges.

Those veteran travelers are today's map makers. It is a long and proud tradition. Map guides — whether a Rand-McNally road atlas, motor league TripTik travel planner or GIS-based travel application — have long been popular for not only sketching the landscape, but identifying a preferred route for the journey. Getting from point A to point B in the area of government modernization is often seen as a daunting journey made without recognizable sign posts along the way.

In a four-part series of e-government map guides, the Center for Digital Government uses a subway map metaphor to define the starting and ending point for modern portal improvement services, along with the major stops along the way. Moreover, the map guide highlights the preferred, or sweet path in contrast to dead-end routes that would send decision-makers to where they do not want to be.



- Simon and Garfunkel, 1965



PART ONE: A JOURNEY WITH A DESTINATION IN MIND

Grand Central Station (itself a metaphor for the portal) is both the beginning point of the journey and the destination. It is where the various lines meet and help people begin, continue and conclude their journey. The making of a successful journey, and getting to a desirable destination, is based on transferring among key stops on three major lines (and staying off spurs). The first of the four pieces is an annotated portal modernization map guide for getting from where you are to where you want to be. The first installment also focuses on the destination — the ends to which governments are working to meet today's needs and tomorrow's expectations for local, mobile and social information and services that fit with the communities served by government.

The trio of follow-on e-government TripTiks focuses on key stops or stations along the way — representing logical groupings of issues and themes to modernization success. Each of the three features a grouping of key decision points that determine how close a jurisdiction stays to the sweet path:



PART TWO: THE BLUE LINE

The Blue Line travels to the capitol campus with stops at the following stations:

- ▶ *Planning the Trip (Strategic Planning)*: Take the time to identify and stay close to the sweet path;
- ▶ *Being Somebody's Rick Steves (Championship)*: More than a conductor or guide, this is somebody — like Rick Steves, the host of a popular PBS travel series in which he and members of his family crisscross the globe — who will make things right and says, "You can't get there from here"; and
- ▶ *Making the Trains Run on Time (Governance)*: Recognize that all the parts are connected into a loosely federated system that have to work together if anybody is going to get anywhere.

PART THREE: THE GREEN LINE

The Green Line travels through financial and business districts with stops at the following stations:

- ▶ *Map Making (Benchmarking)*: Here, travelers come to terms with what they actually know about their starting point and how they'll measure their progress on the journey;
- ▶ *Paying the Fare (Funding Assessment)*: The conductor is going to check sooner or later, so it makes sense to guarantee there is a sustainable way to pay for all of this; and
- ▶ *Cross Cultural Contact (Lost in Translation)*: Here is where those raised in the separate cultures of service delivery, information technology and procurement find a common way of talking with each other to ensure optimum results from scarce public investments.

PART FOUR: THE PURPLE LINE

The Purple Line extends into neighboring communities with stops at the following stations:

- ▶ *Comparing Itineraries*: Where travelers can see how and where others have gone and with what results;
- ▶ *Travel Companions*: Where travelers meet others they must have with them on the journey and see why traveling together is better than going it alone;
- ▶ *The Destination and Beyond*: Where travelers ask the obvious question, “What do we do now that we’re here?” As important as the journey is, a point of arrival demands that other things get done — ongoing operations, continuous improvement, ongoing portal enhancements, monitoring performance and delivering public value.

Each installment will also feature travel advisories from the trip that highlight good practices and essential resources along the way.

THE POINT OF DEPARTURE

Every journey begins somewhere — often a train, subway or bus station. The stations themselves provide architectural cues as to why what happens there is important. They have that in common with seats of government. Consider the capitol dome and, in many cases, their virtual equivalents on the Internet — the portal.

As the official home of the state flag, the state seal and a portrait gallery of leaders past and present, the capitol building is high on symbolism. It is also, by design, high on function. It is the place where the people’s business gets done — supported by a network of operating agencies that stand behind the capitol building with a reach extending across the state. The combination is at once compelling and comforting — just watch the first timers approach the grand edifices and enter these civic temples.

In the sometimes-overused speech of the Internet, the



capitol is the original public-sector portal. As such, it is a useful standard bearer for those who are building 21st-century government.

The state capitol represents a declaration of intent that the people in a geographically defined space — which spans multiple cities and counties — will act together as a single entity, sharing the burdens and the benefits of community. At best, such a community is bound together by both practical considerations of cost reduction and mutual aid, and by a big idea that is sometimes captured in the state motto — Alaska’s “North to the future”; Kansas’ “Ad astra per aspera ... To the stars through difficulties”; and New Hampshire’s embrace of “Live Free or Die” come to mind.

The big idea for the state Internet portal is to provide and support the kind of government that was imagined by the people who first chiseled those words into stone at their respective state houses, without the constraints of time or space that characterized the earlier era. The Internet collapses geographical barriers, making government available at the time and place of the citizen’s choosing.

Just as the capitol is the most carefully maintained real estate in a state, the portal needs that same level of care and attention.¹

What explains the difference between some of these public institutions in that some have been lovingly maintained over the years, others have been refurbished to meet modern expectations and still others have fallen into disrepair? The answer may be in a term of art borrowed from the transportation industry: multimodal.



UTILIZING A MULTIMODAL APPROACH

Bus and train lines that insisted on a go-it-alone strategy where they are the only games in town fared the worst. Those that thrived have been those that integrated themselves into a multimodal environment, such that once single-purpose stations become transit points for subways, heavy- and light-rails, buses, ride sharing and even charging stations for electronic vehicles — all with a view to extending the value of

each previously discrete system and expanding the choices available to the people they serve.

There is a parallel with a shift taking place in digital service delivery. The portal, which has been the nexus of the e-government movement since its inception, is becoming a non-exclusive route into the information and services that stand behind it. A decade ago, the search function was generally regarded as compensation for bad design. The conventional wisdom was that people would and should navigate in two or three clicks to the material they needed. That's changed. Search is now good design, and the preferred choice of a generation of Internet users raised on Google. Similarly, social networks have become aggregation points for people of like interests and concerns, which a growing number of portal operators are tapping as a means to drawing the assembled communities to information and applications which they would find useful — even (or especially) if they are likely not to visit the portal itself.

The portal home page remains the front door of government and it is the standard bearer for the growing suite of online applications that stand behind it and the rapidly growing universe of mobile or smart phone apps that extend its reach to the palm of the user's hand, wherever in the world she might be. The portal and all its extensions are all about a sense of place. It is my town, my city, my state — anytime and anywhere. That sense of comfort and connectedness relies on building and maintaining trust, which begins with ensuring their online services have first-rate functionality and security to support advanced transactions at a time and place of the citizen's or business owner's choosing. It extends to the look and feel of the suite of online offerings, regardless of platform or device, to assure users that the online services they are using are, in fact, from "home" — that is, their government.

Such a multimodal approach — which brings together the portal, a universe of conventional and mobile applications, robust search and a fluid relationship with social networks

¹ Paul W. Taylor, *The Dome as Portal*, Special Supplement to *Government Technology*, March 2002.

— is proof of the old proposition that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. That is especially true when it comes to meeting service delivery, operational and policy objectives — provided that public agencies can get over a natural tendency to defend their domain, whether that is the centrality of the portal or the uniqueness of an application or service of an individual agency’s creation.

The act of overcoming provincial concerns is the function of a determined leader who champions the wider and bigger view for a governance structure that allows a federated environment to act like a single community, as the component parts come together to plan their work and work their plan. The trick in all of this is to recognize that constituents will arrive with baggage but, through meaningful collaboration and co-creation, can leave without it. Changing, engaging and codifying new behaviors can be a trip — a trip on the Blue Line, which is the vital next leg on *Your Journey, Your Way*.

If you have read this far, you have — metaphorically speaking — bought your ticket for the sweet path. That act of deciding changes the conversation from whether to take the journey, to how to make it from station to station. Answering the question of “how” is the focus of the other three installments in this series, which outline the actionable sweet path pioneered and taken by almost half of the nation’s states. Some of their lessons are best practices, others are emerging practices in new areas, but all are told through the experience of states that were in similar situations previously and chose to act. In all cases, they had more to do than they could reasonably do themselves. They had

competing priorities for scarce public resources, and because they chose portal outsourcing, they were able to focus internal resources on other initiatives. Partnering on the portal (and the overall e-government program) provided a clear route from where they were to where they wanted to be.

Two decades of experience in states spread across the country indicate that this journey is a trip best taken in good company. You don’t need any baggage — or to travel by yourself — you just get on board.

*People get ready, there’s a train a comin’
 You don’t need no baggage, you just get on board*
 —Curtis Mayfield and The Impressions, 1964
 and Rod Stewart with Jeff Beck, 1985



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PART 2: THE BLUE LINE

Maps and guides — even iPhone applications — assist the inexperienced subway traveler in figuring out the best routes to take them from point A to point B, building in contingencies for a late train or closed station. As discussed in the first part of *Your Journey, Your Way*, a four-part series on modern portal improvement services, there is no single ‘A’ train to take you from where you are to where you want to go. For most journeys the value lies in making specific connections and combinations with your destination in mind — also known as finding the “sweet path.”

The closer you stay to the sweet path when it comes to the hard work of government modernization, the greater the range of choices you maintain for later in the journey. It is especially important to stay close to the sweet path as public agencies seek to extend the value of existing systems and data to meet the expectations of a public that are being fundamentally reshaped (over and over again) by the Internet.

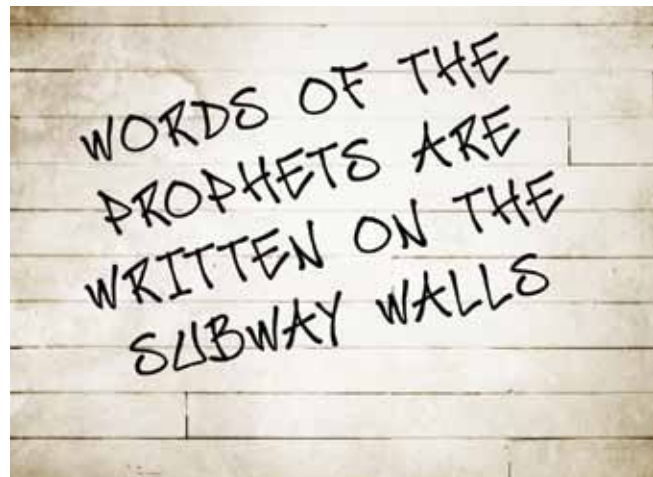
In this second installment in *Your Journey, Your Way*, the Center for Digital Government assesses the metaphorical subway’s Blue Line, which travels to the capitol campus with stops at the following stations:

- *Planning the Trip (Strategic Planning)*: Take the time to identify and stay close to the sweet path;
- *Being Somebody’s Rick Steves (Championship)*: More than a conductor or guide, this is somebody who — like Rick Steves, host of a popular PBS travel series in which he and members of his family crisscross the globe — will make things right and can say, “You can’t get there from here”; and
- *Making the Trains Run on Time (Governance)*: Recognize that all the parts are connected into a loosely federated system that have to work together if anybody is going to get anywhere.

While electronic government goes proudly back to the days of punch cards and green screens, it wasn’t until the late 1990s that government technology was placed in the hands of the public. Sure, some states and localities had Web pages before then, but they weren’t using them for anything. It was only once the transforming power of the Internet had captured the public’s imagination that government began to experiment with these new tools. The first decade of online government was an exciting and challenging time, and all of today’s great e-government platforms were working without the luxury of maps and guidebooks to portal success.

Times have changed. In this second decade of government portal innovation, we have the benefit of lessons learned from the experience of successful programs. The sweet path to success has come into clearer view.

By analyzing what went right, what went wrong and what’s happening now, we are able to chart the course of electronic government with much greater precision. Collecting these lessons and their interpretations provides a helpful roadmap for the next decade of online government innovation.



- Simon and Garfunkel, 1965

PLANNING THE TRIP (STRATEGIC PLANNING)

All travelers know that the hardest part of planning a vacation is choosing where to go — online government is no different.

You might be tempted to think that we've worked this part out, and that the goals of online government are actually easy to define. While it's true that certain lofty aims do appear to be universal and clearly articulated — goals like citizen convenience, cost savings and operational improvements — turning those praiseworthy aims into concrete action is quite another matter.

Some questions in determining the goals of online government entail:

- ⌚ What *exactly* does the public want from online government?
- ⌚ Where do they expect to find it?
- ⌚ Is online government a tool that citizens expect to use, or a service they want us to provide?
- ⌚ Why are we undertaking these projects in the first place?
- ⌚ What will be different when we achieve our goals?



¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strategic_planning

Finally, and most importantly: Will we even recognize our destination when we get there?

The Center for Digital Government has been analyzing, ranking, dissecting and tracking portal excellence since its inception through venerable programs like *Best of the Web* and new ventures like the Digital States Performance Institute. While each state and locality is unique, certain common paths have become apparent by watching the footsteps of the successful travelers of the past decade. The first — both in terms of chronology and in terms of importance — is strategic planning.

Strategic planning can be described as “an organization's process of defining its strategy, or direction, and making decisions on allocating its resources to pursue this strategy, including its capital and people.”¹ That definition is sound, and strategic planning is an activity that we observed early in the states and localities that demonstrated the greatest success in the first decade of online government.

When we look back at the top award winners from the 2008 *Best of the Web* program, namely Virginia, Maine, California, Texas, Alabama and Rhode Island, most states placed a clear and early emphasis on strategic planning. Many of these plans still exist on the Web, and they have been refined over time. While each approach is different in terms of form and outcomes, they all share certain key attributes:

Start with the public. Successful strategic planning efforts begin with the public — who they are, what they expect and how their opinions change over time. History writ large has shown that the best governments were the ones that listened most closely to the will of their people then operated with determined efficiency to make those public goals a reality. Successful electronic government strategic planning processes worked much the same way.

Define a clear vision. It has often been said that strategic planning is about deciding what not to do, since being all things to all people is an impossible approach. It is vital that the public policy goals of an online government effort be stoutly

debated, clearly articulated and well documented. Once these are set, they should remain as a fixed navigational beacon. Clarity of vision will see you through the difficulties that arise along your trip.

Engage technology experts. Good intentions, however well documented, are futile if they are not coupled with honest-to-goodness technology know-how. No amount of consensus among stakeholders will keep your Web site running if you purchase the wrong gear. Utah is a great example in this regard. When Utah learned that the Flash player was on 97 percent of personal computers in the country, they were able to undertake a striking portal facelift that is engaging, interactive and evocative of the best user interfaces on the Web. Technology expertise matters, and it is a critical attribute for online government leadership.

Allow flexibility for changing tactics. It's tempting to think we can predict the future, but our experience teaches that human beings just aren't very good at it. When today's online government leaders began in the late 1990s, no one envisioned a day when members of the public would have broadband Internet access on their mobile phones. While most states were in the first generation of their portal contracts, mobile access was a must. Lucky for these early pioneers, most of them built enough flexibility into their strategic plans to allow for unforeseen detours or changes on the way.

Know your resources and limitations. Funding challenges, the rapid pace of technology innovation, complex regulations

and inter-departmental politics are facts of life. Great plans are firmly rooted in the realities of government work. If your plan depends on things you don't have, can't get or aren't sure of, you may not make it to your destination.

BEING SOMEBODY'S RICK STEVES (CHAMPIONSHIP)

If you went to Europe without a Rick Steves guidebook, then you simply paid too much and didn't have nearly the fun that you could have had. (No matter — there is always next time!) Trips are so much better when they benefit from the experience, wisdom, and, as Rick Steves puts it, “militant optimism” of that unique type of person that we call a *champion*.

TRAVEL ADVISORY:

The bottom line is this: Every project, no matter how successful, will have a do-or-die moment. Your champion is the person who has the commitment and the authority to choose “do.”

A “project champion” is someone who wants you to get as much as possible from the journey, and makes an equal investment of time, talent, political capital and prestige in the task of making it happen. These unique individuals have as near an evangelical zeal as can be found in the professional sphere of life; they are convinced of the merits of their cause, committed to the outcome and vocal promoters to their well-placed colleagues inside and outside of government.

It is also important to note what these people are not. A project champion is not a fellow traveler, and is even more rarely the project manager or director. These are individuals who have reached the top levels of achievement in their fields — think of governors, legislators, commissioners, mayors and county executives — who have a passion for

TRAVEL ADVISORY: THE FIVE KEYS TO STRATEGIC PLANNING

- 🕒 Start with the public
- 🕒 Define a clear vision
- 🕒 Engage technology experts
- 🕒 Allow flexibility for changing tactics
- 🕒 Know your resources and limitations



the cause of online government. In industry, they are called executive sponsors. The steadfast commitment of a well-placed champion is not just important to online government — it is essential.

TexasOnline.com, the highly successful state of Texas online government program, had the benefit of two primary champions that were instrumental in the project's success for most of its first decade. Gov. Rick Perry, as executive champion, consistently guided the project to success by focusing needed resources and brainpower on the project. In the Legislature, State Sen. Eliot Shapleigh of El Paso crafted multiple generations of the foundational laws that made the project possible. Without their bipartisan cooperation and shared championing of the program, TexasOnline.com could have ceased to exist on multiple occasions. Instead, the site boasts more than 800 online services, tens of millions of portal visits, billions of dollars of online revenue and a top five *Best of the Web* ranking in 2008.

The bottom line is this: Every project, no matter how successful, will have a *do-or-die* moment. Your champion is the person who has the commitment and the authority to choose “do.”

MAKING THE TRAINS RUN ON TIME (GOVERNANCE)

Seasoned travelers know that it takes more than a solid plan and a good guidebook to have a great vacation. Without the logistical and tactical leadership to make the trains run on time, we are destined for disappointment. Likewise, good governance is also critical for success in electronic government.

Even at the start of the second decade of online government, governance questions haven't been completely settled. Who will oversee the project? Should one agency take the lead, or should a new cross-agency authority be created? Who is an advisor and who is an operational manager? Will one governance model work for all time, or will we need to restructure over time?

Surveying the top e-government portals shows great diversity in some areas of governance and commonality in others. Regrettably, not all governance models have led to equal success. Interestingly, the states and localities that have evolved their governance models over time have seen the greatest success in this arena. While variations can and do happen around the nation, these key attributes emerge that chart the path to good governance:

Clear operational authority. When everyone is in charge, no one is in charge. The vast majority of the top examples of electronic government programs have a clear organizational chart in which accountability and decision making is ultimately focused on a single individual who is accountable to a larger governance entity, and the others are trending in this direction. These individuals go by a multitude of titles, but they share a common role as the *chief executive officers* of their respective portal operations. Clear decision making — led by an appointed and accountable individual — has proven to be essential to portal success.

Agencies treated as customers. In the best programs, agencies of government take on a role that is less than an owner and more than an advisor. Their stamp of approval is

a critical outcome, and without it, the program will fail. On the other hand, they typically depend on project management and operational resources from an external portal authority to achieve their goals. In the best examples of e-government leadership, agencies and departments are treated as customers of the projects.

Public-private partnership. A public-private partnership is not just a good way to pay for a project — it is also an outstanding way to run a project. By bringing together the disciplines of private-sector capital management and results-oriented operations with civic-minded public policy, real governmental transformation is possible. Fiscal responsibility in service of the public good is a powerful combination indeed.

As a final note, consider the aforementioned comment, that the best models change and evolve over time. To ensure maximum benefits for constituents, build in the ability to modify governance over time as the project matures. Additionally, states don't necessarily have to pass legislation creating a new portal governing authority — the governance model may be in place already and be adapted to the portal. Moreover, a single entity — such as the IT team led by the CIO — can handle governance initially while the state refines and evolves governance.

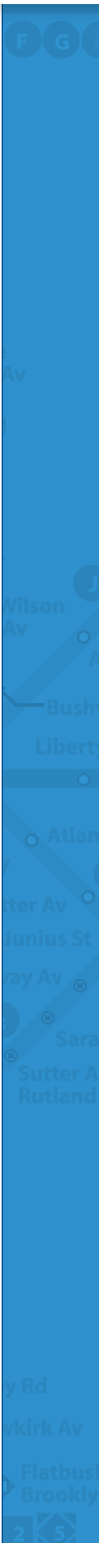
NEXT STOP, THE GREEN LINE...

At this point, you are well on your way to the destination of online government. A solid strategic plan will be your map, and a project champion will make sure that you have the resources and the support to get to the destination. Good governance will let you make maximum use of the resources at your disposal to achieve the best possible outcomes. Next stop is the Green Line, which will address:

- 🕒 Map Making (Benchmarking)
- 🕒 Paying the Fare (Funding Assessment)
- 🕒 Cross Cultural Contact (Lost in Translation)

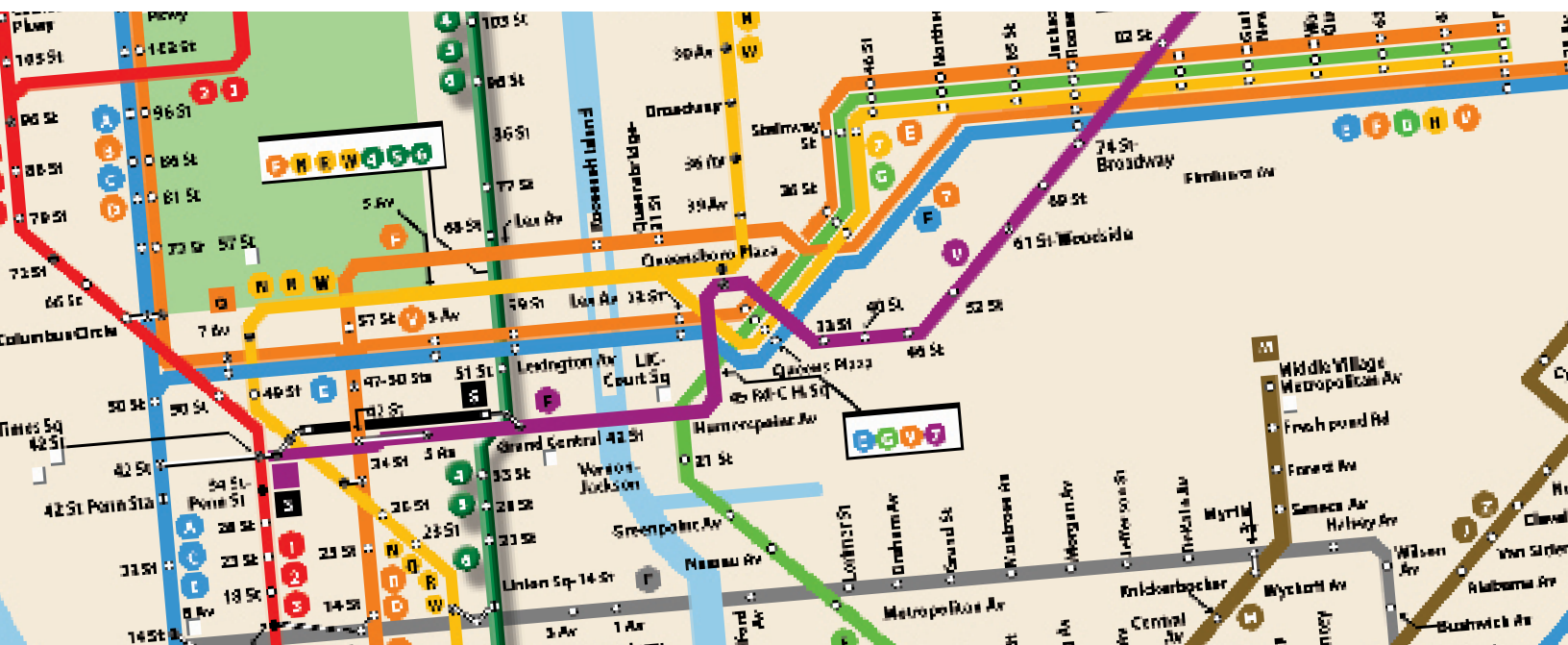
TRAVEL ADVISORY: THE THREE KEYS TO GOOD GOVERNANCE

- 🕒 Clear operational authority
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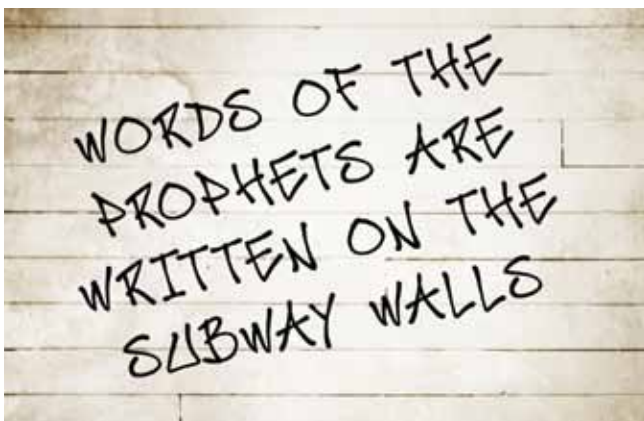


PART 3: THE GREEN LINE

Any inexperienced subway traveler will become more familiar navigating the system after reviewing the map and figuring out the best routes from point A to point B. In addition, after taking some time traveling the Blue Line — which travels to the capitol campus with stops at *Strategic Planning*, *Championship and Governance* stations — our traveler is becoming more comfortable and knowledgeable about modern portal improvement services.

In this third installment of *Your Journey, Your Way*, the Center for Digital Government assesses the next path in the metaphorical subway system: the Green Line, which travels through financial and business districts with stops at the following stations:

- *Map Making (Benchmarking)*: Here, travelers come to terms with what they actually know about their starting point, and how they'll measure their progress on the journey;
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- *Cross Cultural Contact (Lost in Translation)*: Here is where those raised in the separate cultures of service delivery, information technology and procurement find a common way of talking with each other to ensure optimum results from scarce public investments.



- Simon and Garfunkel, 1965

Once you are in motion — and virtually all state and local portals are by this point — the quest for online government excellence becomes a bit more complex. Certain activities that take place during the trip become important as planning and governance issues that were set at the project's inception recede into the rearview mirror.

For those new to the subway, the trip can be either a fearful experience or an exciting one, depending on how you approach the journey. Three key aforementioned practices — benchmarking, funding assessment and intergovernmental collaboration — can make the electronic government journey much more pleasant and ensure better results for the people you serve.

MAP MAKING (BENCHMARKING)

In the second installment, "The Blue Line," we discussed the vital importance of strategic planning, project champions and governance. No doubt, that triad set out a pretty good map for our electronic government voyage. Still, it never hurts to take a quick glance at the vehicles to your left or right, or in front of you, for that matter.

Benchmarking isn't as much about competitive tracking as it is a learning exercise. While states diverge widely in many respects, certain tasks in electronic government are common across all jurisdictions. We all have to package our content to appear in the appropriate places in search results; we all need to make our home pages and online services compelling and interactive; and we all have challenges paying for the wide spectrum of online services demanded by the public.

In these areas of commonality, cross-jurisdictional benchmarking can be a highly effective endeavor. A common passion for understanding benchmarking — and putting the lessons learned into practice — is a hallmark of the top performers in every Center for Digital Government ranking of online government progress.

Consider the fact that a few short years ago, no one had RSS feeds or Web 2.0 tools like Twitter and YouTube on

their portal home pages. Seemingly overnight, they are now everywhere. How did that happen?

It didn't take every individual jurisdiction conducting its own research on its own time to make those tools appear so rapidly on everyone's sites. In this case, the governors of Virginia and California were among the first to begin posting videos on YouTube. They established their own YouTube channels, and then connected those efforts to their portals. When the first leading states and localities embraced social media tools, others quickly followed suit.

As a consistent leader in e-government, Utah officials constantly challenge themselves to generate new ideas, and often use benchmarking in a strategic way to measure themselves against private- and public- sector sites. State leaders took a keen eye to their colleagues' work while taking a serious and deep look at the best practices in leading private-sector Web sites. The result is that Utah has developed a navigational paradigm and home page that is effective and compelling, and sets a new standard for portal excellence.



For the field as a whole, it isn't important that any specific state or locality win a given competition. What is important is that someone sets a new standard, so the rest of us can focus our time on harvesting the ideas that will make the biggest impact on our own efforts.

TRAVEL ADVISORY: CENTER FOR DIGITAL GOVERNMENT BENCHMARKING RESOURCES

- 🕒 Best of the Web Awards Program
- 🕒 Digital Government Achievement Awards
- 🕒 Digital Communities Program
- 🕒 Digital States Performance Institute
- 🕒 Thought-Leadership Whitepapers

PAYING THE FARE (FUNDING ASSESSMENT)

If you are a fan of the travel-themed reality series called "The Amazing Race," or if you traveled widely as a cash-strapped student, then you know how harrowing it can be to be trapped in a distant city without the money you need to get home. Even the most seasoned traveler has very few options when the funds run out. Great plans, strong support and excellent benchmarking intelligence won't close the gap when the budget outlook turns negative.

While the names and places may vary, all states and localities face the same challenges when it comes to funding:

- 🕒 Who will pay the fare for electronic government transformation?
- 🕒 Are there a sufficient number of fare payers to stay on the sweet path?
- 🕒 Where will the money come from?
- 🕒 If I can't get appropriations, am I out of luck?

Early-stage venture capital investors know a thing or two about getting new startups off the ground. Unlike government officials, startup investors hope to see all of their projects become self-funding and self-sustaining. As a result, savvy early-stage investors have learned that it's not just the amount of money that matters, but the *quality* of the money.

Funding is funding, right? A quick look around the country shows that this is unfortunately not the case. Different methods of raising revenue have different characteristics, and they react quite distinctly when the stresses and strains of bad times emerge. There are three main sources of funding for any electronic government initiative:

- 🕒 Transaction fees paid by citizens or businesses on a pay-per-use basis
- 🕒 Assessments to agencies in a service bureau model
- 🕒 Direct appropriations from a budget authority

Arguably, the most successful portals make use of all of these mechanisms to some degree or another. What distinguishes the winning projects, however, is that they tend to derive the vast majority of their funding from the first method: transaction fees on the public and businesses.



The high correlation between portal success and a transaction-fee-base revenue structure is no accident. It has everything to do with the quality (or color) of the money being used to fund the portal. In general, transaction fees have the following characteristics that make them the preferable funding source for state portals:

Revenue Stability and Sustainability. As the economic climate has shifted wildly since September 2008, transaction revenue for portals has stayed comparatively stable. The reason is that transaction fees are directly tied to the level of demand for portal services. Renewing a driver's license, registering a new business or getting your car inspected are not discretionary purchases. Transaction fees aren't tied to property value fluctuations or changes in the labor market. Demand for services and the revenue to pay for them are as tightly correlated as they can be in a public-sector context. Many states with progressive e-government solutions such as Kansas, Arkansas, Nebraska, Utah and Virginia, have been using transaction-based funding for more than 10 years, proving that the model has staying power.

Pay for Performance. Self-funded portals are one of the purest examples of pay-for-performance anywhere in government. If a public-private partnership doesn't build services that people want to use, then people won't use them. No money, no more portal services. Since the revenue stream is so directly tied to the services provided, gaining consensus on the right mix of services to provide and how to provide them becomes much easier.

Availability of Investment Capital. While the general markets for investment capital have certainly tightened, private-sector partners are still willing to put capital at risk to fund the development of new government services in a transaction-fee model. While the returns are lower than what might be expected in other types of investments, the risk involved in funding a government service is correspondingly lower as

well. This brings private backers to the table in ways that are not possible with other funding regimes.

As a final note on paying the fare, remember that while money is necessary for a trip, it isn't why you took the trip in the first place. Revenue is always a means to an end, not an end in itself. The purpose of our comments here is to provide clear guidance to ensure that sufficient funds are available to focus on the real top priorities. The top goal, of course, is about good public policy: to deliver the services that the public needs in the most effective manner possible.

TRAVEL ADVISORY: THE COLOR OF MONEY

Not all revenue is created equal. The high correlation between portal success and a transaction-fee-base revenue structure is no accident. It has everything to do with the quality (or color) of the money being used to fund the portal.

CROSS CULTURAL CONTACT (INTERGOVERNMENTAL COLLABORATION)

If benchmarking is important, then intergovernmental collaboration is critical. In the last segment of our series, we drew upon advice from travel guru Rick Steves. Consider this guidance from our hearty travel champion: "Many travelers toss aside their hometown blinders. Their prized souvenirs are the strands of different cultures they decide to knit into their own character. The world is a cultural yarn shop."

Government portals may strive for the top spot in this or that ranking, but they are much more like colleagues than competitors. Conveniently, our jurisdictions don't overlap much (except in the case of certain state and local functions), and we don't have anything to fear from our neighbors. On the contrary, we have quite a bit to learn.

The very fact that each government is different makes our colleagues in other states all the more useful as a creative laboratory for experimentation, trial and error. Have we learned from each other's project plans? Do we read each other's requests for proposals? Even better, have any of us ever read the *responses* that companies provided to another state's or locality's inquiries? Do we network, collaborate and brainstorm with each other at events where we typically congregate?

Our travel expert Rick Steves is fond of saying that "extroverts have more fun." We can all relate to the fact that traveling with friends and colleagues is much more enjoyable than a trip alone. By building a web of relationships among jurisdictions, we can all reach online government success faster.

TRAVEL ADVISORY: CROSS CULTURAL CONTACT

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NEXT STOP, THE PURPLE LINE...

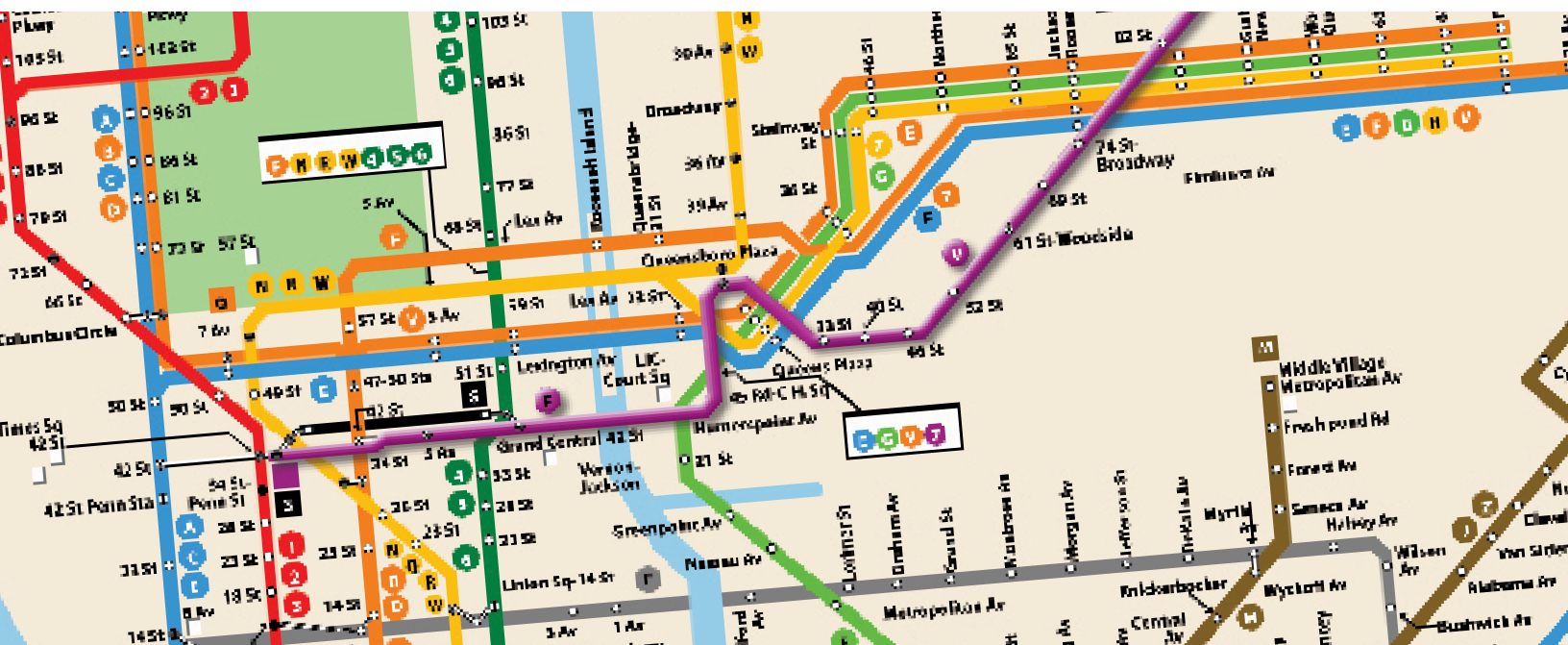
"The next stop is Park Street, change for the Purple Line..."

In installment four, we will address:

- Comparing Itineraries
- Travel Companions
- The Destination and Beyond

YOUR JOURNEY, YOUR WAY:

*CHOICES, CONNECTIONS AND A GUIDE TO THE SWEET
PATH IN GOVERNMENT PORTAL MODERNIZATION*



PART 4: THE PURPLE LINE

*Everybody wants to slap your back
wants to shake your hand
when you're up on top of that mountain
But let one of those rocks give way then you slide
back down look up
and see who's around then*

*This ain't where the road comes to an end
This ain't where the bandwagon stops
This is just one of those times when
A lot of folks jump off*

*Run your car off the side of the road
Get stuck in a ditch way out in the middle of nowhere
Or get yourself in a bind, lose the shirt off your back
Need a floor, need a couch, need a bus fare
Man, I've been there*

*You find out who your friends are
Somebody's gonna drop everything
Run out and crank up their car
Hit the gas, get there fast
Never stop to think 'what's in it for me?' or 'it's
way too far'
They just show on up with their big old heart
You find out who your friends are*

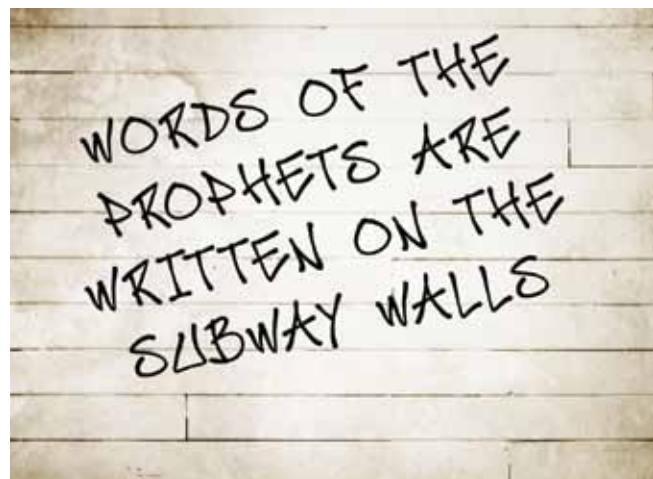
– Tracy Lawrence, 2007

Compare old and new subway maps and you will notice that blue and green are classic colors for the core lines that are the system's backbone. So it is with this guide to the sweet path for government portal modernization.

As the systems and the territories they serve expanded, so did the range of colors used to identify new lines. Purple would have been an unusual choice for a subway line at the turn of the 20th century, because it signified wealth and its trappings. By the turn of the 21st century, however, the color had been democratized to the point that purple was the official color of the fight against pancreatic cancer, aging boldly and with new horizons. It is appropriate then, that our Purple Line would take us to places once considered exotic territory or somehow out of scope.

In this fourth installment of *Your Journey, Your Way*, the Center for Digital Government assesses the next path in the metaphorical subway system: the Purple Line, which extends into neighboring communities with stops at the following stations:

- 🕒 Comparing Itineraries
- 🕒 Travel Companions
- 🕒 The Destination and Beyond



- Simon and Garfunkel, 1965

COMPARING ITINERARIES

Most journeys worth taking have more than one possible route. Because of this, there is no single sweet path. However, the paths do come with varying levels of sweetness. And complexity. And cost. And control, or autonomy. In short, there are trade-offs on the journey that should be navigated with eyes wide open.

The dot-com era came complete with a number of companies that offered to do for government what other start-ups were doing for retailing and financial services — all-in-one turn-key solutions, outsourcing applications one at a time or combinations of the two. Most have gone the way of the Pets.com sock puppet. Significantly, though, over the past 17 years, a group of more than 20 states have partnered with a single company, operating through state-specific, wholly-owned subsidiaries.

While each state operation was primarily concerned with meeting the policy objectives, strategic goals and service delivery needs of the public partner, it came with the structural advantage to share useful applications and best practices across sister states within the systems. There are more than 2,000 applications in service across the partnering states and available for customization and implementation to other network states. Moreover, the portal and the suite of applications that stood up behind them came with the promise of paying for themselves through the assessment of fees on a small number of high value transactions, which brought needed relief to the general fund.

In its early years, out of an abundance of caution, the public-private partnerships that formed around the so-called “self-funded model” sometimes came with legislative changes and the creation of complex joint governance structures. The partnering states’ experience helped refine the model in ways that ensured public accountability and no loss of public services, while streamlining the administrative overhead once deemed necessary when the model seemed untested

and radical. After nearly two decades of supporting states from Arizona to West Virginia, the legislative and governance requirements are much lower and the model’s track record continues to speak for itself. Legislation to create new governance models, or create a special authority to charge fees is often no longer necessary because most states already have the needed statutory framework and enterprise governance models in place for the management of the larger state technology program. These can be leveraged for the portal.

TRAVEL ADVISORY: A PLACE ON THE PORTAL, A PLACE AT THE TABLE

For an extended discussion of governance models and other structural considerations, see the Center for Digital Government white paper, *This Old Portal*, available as a free download from the Center’s Web site (www.centerdigitalgov.com) under the publications tab.

TRAVEL COMPANIONS

*If you're living in a bubble
Then I guess you got no troubles
But if you're anything like me
Well then I bet you really need
To take a ride
Let's take a ride on the love train*

– Big and Rich, 2004

No digital government project would be confused with a trip on the love train. But when there is an agenda — improving public service delivery — and a way to pay for it — self funding — contentious meetings about domain can become meaningful collaboration among formerly discrete public agencies to develop a shared platform for modern service

delivery. Going it alone has always been difficult. It becomes all the more impractical and costly in an era when users expect immediate access to online experiences that are local, social, mobile and global.

When the discussion shifts from questions of “what” to “how,” and a platform approach such as the one previously described is readily available without financial barriers, it allows states to build a critical mass or, more properly, a scalable community around online service delivery.

One of the most difficult stops to navigate on the Purple Line is a place called procurement. It can be a cross cultural experience, where technologists, business managers and procurement officials — each speaking their own private language — often talk past each other and never understand their common interest in procuring a public-private partnership in which the cost section calls for revenue, rather than expenditure.

It represents a challenge to deeply engrained bureaucratic practices and a procurement environment that often provides no legal way for the government to buy things that are free.

A related challenge is the not so subtle difference between procuring a commodity product versus a dynamic

set of services that cater to the public’s evolving needs for — and expectations of — online services. Public procurement processes were forged around the former, some of which have proven unhelpful with the latter. That said, a number of states have begun to adapt their procurement practices to reconcile past practices with today’s practices and tomorrow’s prospects. For example, Texas recently conducted a rebid of its original portal contract. Procurement officials worked closely with the lead agency, the Department of Information Resources (DIR), to run a competitive procurement that protected and promoted the state’s interests, while adapting to the realities of contemporary technology business models:

Pricing: On the question of “free,” or how procurement evaluates a no-cost service, Texas evaluated the bidders’ overall investment in portal services over the life of the contract, as well as the narrative of how the vendor planned to deliver upon the state’s desired business model.

Contract length: Many states have limitations on contract length, but a transaction-based enterprise portal may require several years for the state or private-sector provider to recoup the initial investment. Texas elected to provide an initial seven-year term with renewals if the vendor is performing at satisfactory levels. This gives ample time to make necessary investments in services throughout the contract.

Terms and conditions: Texas understood the difference between model and mandatory contract terms, recognizing that potential bidders may stay on the sidelines because of rigid language. Texas included a base contract in the Request for Offer (RFO) and asked the bidders to provide exceptions and additional terms in their responses. This set a baseline for negotiations, but did not eliminate potential bidders that could not agree with all of Texas’s terms.

Contract structure: Form follows function, and Texas was interested in maximizing the number of agencies that would participate in the portal over the life of a multi-year contract. Texas used a simple contract structure that



features a single master contract with baseline terms for the overall services. Agencies that elect to participate will execute a customer agreement, which defines the specific services to be provided, as well as any changed or additional terms and conditions. This contract structure affords the flexibility to adapt for services that may not be predicted when the master contract is signed.

The overall procurement goal was to maximize competition by providing enough flexibility to attract the best available portal service providers to the competitive rebid, while delivering a flexible contract that could adapt to the immediate and future goals of DIR and TexasOnline.

TRAVEL ADVISORY:

One of the most difficult stops to navigate on the Purple Line is a place called procurement. It can be a cross cultural experience, where technologists, business managers and procurement officials — each speaking their own private language — often talk past each other and never understand their common interest in procuring a public-private partnership in which the cost section calls for revenue, rather than expenditure.

THE DESTINATION AND BEYOND

Many trips end with an emblazoned T-shirt. Many online efforts end with a sentiment worthy of a T-shirt — been there, done that, got the portal. After the dot-com era of the late 1990s, a new conventional wisdom set in that suggested that e-government was essentially done. That conventional wisdom was wrong.

Indeed, tweaking the portal has become an annual rite of summer in leading states. In the season just passed, California and Michigan both refreshed and streamlined their landing pages, adding and recategorizing features, functions

and content according to their respective priorities and how people actually use their sites — primarily for living, working and visiting. Michigan's latest update reflects an effort to present information and services using clear, plain language and organizing them under a double-decker set of horizontal tabs, one above and the other below the updated masthead. California opted for a simpler, streamlined look too. There is a certain California sensibility to services highlighted as individual or groups of products, each carrying its own brand — the bright colors of which stand out boldly against a toned down monochromatic Ca.gov background.

In keeping with their respective sensibilities, Michigan neatly itemizes its use of Web 2.0 under an appropriately labeled tab, while California ties itself graphically to brand name social networks such as Twitter, Facebook, Myspace and YouTube, among others, which carries with it an explicit call to engage government in these new ways during a new season of transparency and public accountability.

An informal comparison of these sites on the Wayback Machine demonstrates a tendency toward continuity and incremental improvements over time for both state portals. The changes are new enough to get noticed, useful enough to improve navigation and access to services, but nothing particularly disruptive.

Not so for Utah.gov. Not this time. The state portal re-launched in early June 2009 with extensive use of Flash, a Mac-like carousel of feature icons, a prominent and expanded search function intended to wrap results in actionable context (the list of services below the search field changes dynamically to match what the user types), and an innovative feature that uses non-invasive Geo-IP technology to identify the area of Utah from which the user is coming so it can serve up relevant information. Geo-IP mapping has the added advantage of screening out the clutter.

One of the co-authors of this series of white papers posted an early review on the blog at govtechblogs.com/fastgov. He gave it a hyperbolic headline, "This is the portal you've been

waiting for.” The critics were concise. “You’re kidding, right?” asked an incredulous commenter Lynne.

Lynne and a pair of developers who work on a state portal elsewhere in the country were among those who took Utah to task for taking too many risks. Much of it had a scolding tone, “There is no way this would pass usability testing,” and, “This is a government Web site that should be providing information in a consistent manner that is usable by all of its residents.”

The online debate drew out Utah Technology Services’ Chief Technical Architect Bob Woolley, and this rejoinder, “Good design does not preclude accessibility. Similarly, poor or unimaginative design does not ensure accessibility or usability.”

State CTO David Fletcher reminded his critics of the business drivers behind Utah.gov’s campaign to be relevant to state residents — including those who are Flash-ready, smart phone-equipped, high-speed connected, data hungry and widget happy. You don’t build an online constituency that includes everybody without them, and Utah was deliberate in its pursuit of advanced functionality to satisfy the demands of the state’s large population of tech-savvy citizens.

As with such moments earlier in the digital government movement, there may ultimately be no need to reconcile friends. Our shared future is in maintaining carefully developed (and jealously guarded) design disciplines while taking measured risk to meet developing expectations today ... knowing that they will likely become tomorrow’s needs.

CONCLUSION: THE PEOPLE’S SPACE

*A light made of silver, through my window in creeps
 And the train keeps on rollin’ and it just rocks me to sleep*

*So goodnight, yeah goodnight
 Goodnight train is gonna carry me home
 So goodnight, yeah goodnight
 Goodnight train is gonna carry me home*

– Gerry Rafferty, City to City, 1978

On the sweet path to a preferred digital future, there is still important work to be done in expanding functionality, hardening security and becoming more disciplined in content management on most public-service portals.

It is sobering to walk the halls of state capitols and other public spaces, including subway and train stations. The architecture, the statuary, and the inscriptions all reflect the aspirations of the people who dared to carve their values and dreams into stone. The permanence, the elegance and the grandeur of these public spaces may point out a faulty design assumption in much of what has been built in the government Internet space to date — we dream too small.



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