

Commonwealth Connect uses smartphone GPS technology to automatically identify the location of the problem being reported.



On June 18, Administration and Finance Secretary Glen Shor joined officials from the city of Boston and other participating municipalities to formally launch a new smartphone “app” that allows residents to report quality-of-life problems, such as graffiti and potholes, in real time directly to their local government for resolution. Based on an app called Citizens Connect developed by the city of Boston, Commonwealth Connect is now available in forty-five cities and towns across the state and will soon be available in fifty-four.

Participating municipalities, chosen through a competitive application process, now have access to a tool that transforms communication between citizens and their local government. Commonwealth Connect communities include twenty-five cities, ten of which are Gateway Cities, and twenty-nine towns. A total of 2.5 million people—38 percent of the Commonwealth—can be served through this program.

Available through both the iTunes Store and Google Play, the app has been downloaded more than 3,600 times since its early release in some communities in January. Nearly 8,000 service requests have been submitted in forty cities and towns.

Tim Dodd is Local Government Program Manager at the Executive Office for Administration and Finance.

COMMONWEALTH CONNECT

EMPOWERS RESIDENTS AND MUNICIPAL STAFF

By TIM DODD

Originally implemented in Boston through the Mayor’s Office of New Urban Mechanics, the app has resulted in more than 45,000 improvements in the city’s neighborhoods since 2009. Today, more than 20 percent of all quality-of-life requests the city receives come through Citizens Connect.

Commonwealth Connect is made possible by a \$400,000 Community Innovation Challenge Grant awarded to the city of Boston by the Patrick administration in 2012. The two-year-old CIC Grant program, administered by the Executive Office for Administration and Finance, invests in innovations that have the potential to lower costs and

improve services through regionalization, new uses of technology, and improved management practices. The goal is to provide communities with tools and resources to improve the delivery of services that citizens want. Commonwealth Connect is just one example of an innovative way to empower citizens and keep them engaged in their communities—because engaged citizens make neighborhoods and municipalities better.

“Commonwealth Connect makes it even easier for residents and government to partner on creating great neighborhoods,” says Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino. “I appreciate the Commonwealth’s leadership and support on this project, scaling an

COMMONWEALTH CONNECT PARTICIPATING MUNICIPALITIES

Andover	Fall River	Middleborough	Saugus
Ayer	Fitchburg	Nantucket	Seekonk
Barnstable	Framingham	Needham	Somerville
Bedford	Franklin	New Bedford	Sudbury
Boston	Halifax	Newton	Swampscott
Braintree	Haverhill	North Adams	Taunton
Brookfield	Holliston	Northampton	Wakefield
Chelsea	Hopkinton	North Andover	Ware
Chicopee	Lexington	Orange	Watertown
Chilmark	Lowell	Quincy	Westborough
Clarksburg	Malden	Randolph	West Boylston
Eastham	Medway	Revere	Whitman
Easton	Melrose	Royalston	Woburn
Everett			Worcester

approach that's working well in Boston to municipalities across the state."

HOW IT WORKS

Commonwealth Connect uses smartphone GPS technology to automatically identify the location of the problem being reported. Residents are able to report downed telephone lines, graffiti, potholes, broken streetlights, uneven roads, and other issues. To file a report, residents carrying their smartphones open the app, take a photo of the problem, and submit it instantly to their municipality. For every case submitted, the resident gets a tracking number that can be used to follow the progress of the resolution.

The application supports municipal staff by providing a work-order management system that allows them to track requests and collect data on response times and the locations of requests. Each participating community has received support from the city of Boston and SeeClickFix, a company that helped Boston with the development of Citizens Connect, as the community develops the app and its work-order system. Each app is customized with the municipality's colors and logo, and each municipality has worked to determine up to ten categories to be included in the app. The municipalities entered into agreements with the city of Boston and SeeClickFix for a period of three years. This past spring, the city of

Boston held information sessions about the app in Greenfield, Springfield, Ashland and Barnstable.

Malden Mayor Gary Christenson says Commonwealth Connect has transformed the way his city interacts with residents. "Since our launch in March," he says, "we have seen nearly 3,000 requests submitted, and I could not be more pleased with the positive effect it has had on quality-of-life issues that are very important to our residents."

Northampton Mayor David Narkewicz says his city's residents "quickly embraced this expanded citizen engagement tool" and have reported nearly 700 issues since the "soft launch" in January. "The city is now working toward integration of Commonwealth Connect with our work-order management system, called VueWorks," he says.

Fall River Mayor William Flanagan says the convenience of the app for residents is a key selling point. "Whether it's five in the afternoon or five in the morning, we are now connected with our citizens on issues that are non-emergency happenings here in the city," he says.

REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

Through its CIC Grant program, the Patrick administration seeks to inspire innovation and find opportunities for neighboring communities to build partnerships to deliver local services more effectively and efficiently. When neighboring communities build partnerships



to engage in shared services, inter-municipal agreements, municipal collaborations, consolidations, mutual aid, and regional planning, they can reduce duplication of effort and save taxpayer dollars. Programs like the CIC grants are intended to provide resources to allow state and local officials to collaborate on initiatives to reduce costs, improve services and increase efficiency.

The CIC Grant program, first proposed in the governor's fiscal 2012 state budget and supported by the Legislature, provided \$4 million for twenty-seven regionalization and other initiatives in its first year. In fiscal 2013, \$2.25 million was provided for thirty regionalization and other projects. The CIC Grant provides incentives such as technical assistance, training, and other one-time or transition costs. 🌟