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USACE cuts costs, saves resources in Afghanistan

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan — The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Afghanistan Engineer District-South is implementing measures to streamline business processes and save tax-payer dollars. The district is moving out on information technology upgrades, non-tactical vehicle procurement and maintenance improvements, and connection to the Kandahar Airfield electric power network.

According to Col. Benjamin Wham, the South District commander, there are always ways to improve and often those innovative ideas save time as well as money. “I challenged my office chiefs to look at their processes and identify ways the South District could become more efficient,” Wham said.

Information Technology

Taking the challenge seriously, the Information Technology Office (J6) is undertaking significant cost-saving measures that will speed service, improve connectivity and reduce the number of employees in Afghanistan.



Wilton Hobbs, an information technology specialist adjusts a satellite dish at the South District's, Herat Area Office. USACE Photo by Karla Marshall

What is the Defense Information Systems Agency?

Their mission, as a combat support agency, is to engineer and provide command and control capabilities and enterprise infrastructure to continuously operate and ensure a global net-centric enterprise in direct support to joint warfighters, national-level leaders, and other mission and coalition partners across the full spectrum of operations.

The first effort is replacing expensive satellite connectivity with a terrestrial-based, fiber connection via the Defense Information Systems Agency's already existing infrastructure or line-of-sight microwave connections. Using the DISA infrastructure will eliminate expensive site-by-site connectivity hardware and manpower to support that hardware, which reduces the total cost of ownership.

“There are several benefits to migrating to the DISA fiber network,” said Chris Brooks, the J6 chief. “We can decrease the number of servers necessary to provides functionality and in many cases remove costly server infrastructure entirely. Cutting down the number of servers by using virtual servers in a software environment will take less space and electricity, and we can purchase new technology that will eliminate the need for traditional desktop computers.”

With fewer pieces of hardware, the South District will need fewer related resources and less infrastructure. Data processing will occur on virtual servers, which translates to additional cost savings.

“With this migration from traditional workspaces and satellite connectivity to a fiber-based virtual enterprise, we will have one-time costs that include purchasing and laying a relatively small amount of cable and a termination charge. Once those costs are paid, the South District will eliminate a roughly \$3 million annual bandwidth budget for unclassified, military internet connectivity.”

Computer life-cycle costs will also go down. Currently the district replaces desktop computer systems yearly because of the harsh environment — primarily pervasive dust. With the virtual client technology, the systems can last five to seven years and will save \$250,000 each time the entire computer stock is replaced.

In addition, the number of personnel needed to maintain the South District’s technology will decrease. The estimated cost savings are between \$2 million and \$3 million per year once the migration is complete.

Finally, the District will be able to use “Power over Ethernet” technology for phones and virtual desktops which will significantly reduce fuel consumption. According to Brooks the fuel saving estimates may be as much as 60 percent of the current costs.

Non-tactical vehicles

Driving on Kandahar Airfield is a necessity for South District employees, but the options for leasing and maintaining vehicles are few.

Recently the South District’s Joint Logistics staff (J4) collaborated with support elements on Kandahar Airfield to determine a better way to sustain the District’s vehicle fleet. By coordinating the South District’s requirements with U. S. Forces – Afghanistan, the South District will be able to utilize pre-existing logistics services to both obtain and maintain vehicles provided by the NATO Maintenance and Supply Agency.

This approach has several potential outcomes, the most significant being a monthly cost savings of \$43,427 to as much as \$71,600. Added to the significant savings is local maintenance support resulting in less down-time per vehicle.

“We have the potential of improving the overall reliability and availability of the vehicle fleet at Kandahar Airfield. We also have the potential of realizing significant tangible savings,” said Raymond Urena, logistics chief. “Our goal is to have this new vehicle service plan in place by Jan. 1, 2012.”

Power

The South District’s Operations and Maintenance Division is pursuing a conversion from stand-alone, diesel generator power for the district compound on Kandahar Airfield to obtaining prime power off the airfield’s master electrical power grid. This conversion will save more than \$1.4 million per year.

“Direct savings to the district includes \$200,000 per year in generator maintenance and major overhaul,” said Bill Slezak, the Operations and Maintenance Branch chief. “The rest comes from a reduction in fuel consumption.”

“These cost- saving measures are significant,” said Wham. “And when we reduce fuel consumption and the number of people we require to complete our mission in Afghanistan, we directly reduce the danger to troops, civilians and contractors.

“As America tightens its belt, we must maintain effectiveness with fewer resources and I am confident that the South District will rise to the challenge,” Wham concluded.

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