

# Combining Resources, Improving Safety and Quality of Life

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*Deep East Texas Council of Governments' preparedness for emergency management has greatly improved since implementing a Highway Advisory Radio system.*

Government agencies across the United States – cities, counties, municipalities – all work to improve the quality of life for citizens in their region. Sometimes improvements are difficult to implement or are slow to finalize due to funding or other reasons. No one will argue, however, that safety should be the top priority.

The Deep East Texas Council of Governments (DETCOG) has combined the resources of local governments to provide funding, training, mitigation, and oversee programs such as emergency management to give residents the best possible quality of life.

DETCOG is a unique association of counties, cities, independent school districts, river authorities,

soil and water conservation districts, hospitals districts, and even private industry members, spanning a 12 county region in deep southeast Texas. The association is completely voluntary and operates a wide variety of planning and service programs.

## **Emergency Management via Radio?**

Remember hurricane Rita (September 2005), or hurricane Ike (September 2008)? So does Texas. Both storms affected the area, causing disheartening destruction and loss of life.

Living in a hurricane-prone region means facing challenges that



other areas of the country do not even have to consider. DETCOG has tackled the issue by implementing a network of Travelers Information Stations, also called Highway Advisory Radio, to assist residents during hurricane situations. The Highway Advisory Radio (HAR) are stations that use AM radio frequencies to broadcast messages to motorists about traffic delays, emergency evacuation plans, special events, or other non-commercial issues.

Mr. John McDowell, DETCOG's Program Director for Emergency Preparedness /Homeland Security, is leading the effort for implementing the HAR systems, and knows the importance of communicating critical information. He recalls four major hurricane evacuation events affecting the deep east Texas region, hurricane Rita holding the lead for the largest number of evacuees with an estimated three million people vacating the coast.

"During a hurricane evacuation residents may be stuck in traffic for hours. They need to know where to get fuel, water, medicine, or even where the nearest restroom is located," Mr. McDowell comments.

Imagine being trapped on the highway for 18 hours and only moving 10 miles. This can be a reality during a hurricane evacuation. When motorists are informed about the situation they feel safer and are more likely to remain calm. This allows Emergency Management teams to focus on providing shelter assistance, fuel for motorists as necessary, and emergency medical attention.

## 90 Seconds to Relay a Message

DETCOG's advisory radio project included the commissioning of eight HAR sites located north of the Golden Triangle, an area near the Louisiana border and the Gulf coast. Of the eight HAR sites, four are located on U.S. Highway 59 north of Houston, spread over a 60 mile

area, and the other four in nearby counties. The sites were chosen strategically according to their proximity to the Golden Triangle, as this is the area most evacuees flee from.

DETCOG chose highway advisory radio equipment manufactured by Quixote Transportation Technologies, Inc. (now part of Vaisala). Each site is a fixed or permanent Highway Advisory Radio station, called a HiWay Max®, and they are integrated with mobile, changeable message signs that flash a message alerting motorists to tune their radios to the right frequency.

The advantage of using an HAR station is that you get 90 seconds of time to relay a message – plenty of time to explain current weather conditions, estimated travel times, locations of shelters or other detailed instructions for evacuees. Changeable roadway signs do not allow for this sort of detailed instructions as they can only convey a small amount of data.

During these times it is critical to provide the most information possible to motorists leaving the region. With the HAR systems, DETCOG can broadcast several messages in a set, and they repeat until new information is recorded. The messages can be updated quickly as weather or traffic conditions change.

McDowell adds that DETCOG is planning Phase II of the project, which will include two more sites on U.S. Highway 59 and another in Jasper County.

"The U.S. 59 sites will be placed on the north and south ends, giving us six total sites along the route. The Jasper County site will be synchronized with the existing site in the county and motorists will hear the same message seamlessly throughout this region."

## From Traffic Jams to Flea Markets: Off-Season Uses

DETCOG was able to secure funding for the HAR sites so that local cities



Message signs alert motorists to tune their radios to the right frequency.

or counties could use the sites on a regular basis. Since DETCOG is a voluntary association with participation from various community services, it was clear that the HAR sites would serve residents and travelers from all parts of the region.

Although the main purpose of the HAR sites is for emergency management, the systems can also broadcast information on major traffic accidents (travel times, alternate routes, etc.), safety laws, or local events such as flea markets or festivals. Any community service organization participating in the DETCOG program has the option to supply a message for broadcasting non-commercial information to the public.

### Further information:

[www.qttinc.com/pages/hisproducts.html](http://www.qttinc.com/pages/hisproducts.html)

Vaisala's acquisition of Quixote Transportation Technologies, Inc. increases customer support and offering to the road weather and information technology industry.

Turn the page to read more.





# Acquisition of QTT Increases Customer Support and Offering to Roads Industry

*In late December 2009, Vaisala acquired the U.S. based Quixote Transportation Technologies, Inc.*

*(QTT) to grow its presence in the global road weather and information technology business.*

*The acquisition increased Vaisala's offering in the roads industry, with concentrated focus to best meet customer needs and improve operational efficiency, quality and customer service.*

Vaisala now offers a more complete line of road weather solutions enhanced with QTT's traffic counting and highway advisory radio products and services. The merger provides an opportunity to offer more comprehensive ITS solutions to the customers.

The term ITS refers to Intelligent Transportation Systems, information and communications technology applications added to transport infrastructure and vehicles, which aims

to improve safety and optimize travel routes, especially in congested areas.

## **Products with Greatest Synergy between Weather and Traffic**

Vaisala will continue developing products that offer the greatest synergy between weather and traffic. Technologically speaking, the acquisition brought together two leading companies in the industry with

complementing strengths, which means that Vaisala is now in a unique position to develop its range of products, solutions and services further.

Both RWIS (Road Weather Information System) technology platforms will remain part of Vaisala's offering, but the third party sensors formerly used by QTT will be replaced with Vaisala's own core technology. The replacement will take place gradually as the needed development projects are completed. Former QTT products that open up new areas in terms of Vaisala's product portfolio such as Highway Advisory Radio (HAR) and portable and permanent traffic analyzers will naturally continue to be available.

The services team has been expanded as a result of the merger, which will increase Vaisala's geographical coverage and improve response time. Customers can be assured of continued support for the existing installed base and Vaisala's commitment to exceptional products and services.