

Dear government GIS decision makers,

Hopefully you are aware of the Microsoft Bing Maps for Enterprise with Imagery Collection proposal recently negotiated between the State of Michigan and Microsoft. Having reviewed and discussed the proposal, the Michigan Counties Association of Mapping Professionals (MiCAMP) Board would like to take a moment to weigh-in on the subject.

Having worked with the Center for Shared Solutions (CSS) on the concept for such a program since early 2008, the MiCAMP Board does not hesitate to acknowledge the following:

- there will always be issues associated with any proposal of this magnitude;
- this approach to state-wide imagery definitely leads into uncharted territory;
- a one-size-fits-all solution is extremely difficult to design that can accommodate the diversity of Michigan's government landscape, political boundaries and population distribution;
- any solution must have simplicity in administration; and
- the timeline is almost always short for the speed at which government typically functions.

Nevertheless, the MiCAMP Board finds the proposal fundamentally sound, encourages you to familiarize yourself with the proposal as soon as possible, urges you to give it very serious consideration and finally, to make your intentions on participating known to the state. An unbelievable amount of work that has gone into negotiating this proposal and a decision needs to be made by the state within the next couple of weeks. Without adequate support, it may be many years before a similar opportunity presents itself.

The proposal works on several levels, one short term, the other long term. Down the stretch, the key question is whether this type of approach can lead to a sustainable state-wide imagery program. Fortunately, this question does not have to be answered immediately and there will be ongoing opportunities to discuss it starting with the MiCAMP conference next week.

The short term issue is more pressing and critical as it will determine whether the program gets off the ground. In order to succeed, the State of Michigan needs to secure roughly 11,000 square miles of partnership commitment to fly in 2010. Several counties have already expressed a serious interest and a handful more are needed.

While every county must determine its own desire and ability to participate, the MiCAMP Board feels that there are several key areas to consider as you make your decision.

Cost: Imagery decisions are usually based on prior points of reference. If you have acquired imagery in the past, you would expect to pay roughly the same amount for the same product today assuming cost savings from technological advances negate inflation. In addition, if the state and the private sector (in this case Microsoft) were both contributing to the acquisition, the cost to a partnering county should be considerably less than if they were to acquire the same imagery independently. MiCAMP believes this cost savings has been achieved in this proposal. For example, the total acquisition cost to a standard 16 township county of 1' color digital orthoimagery through this partnership opportunity would be \$16,128 or \$28 / square mile. A buy-up option to 6" would tentatively cost a total of \$61,632 or \$107 / square mile (exact cost for 6" is still being negotiated).

Compare these prices with quotes you received the last time you acquired imagery. While it may be possible that you have some lower quotes, make sure that you are truly comparing equivalent products and imagery specifications. Don't forget to factor in the benefits/savings gained by not having to manage the contract and the inclusion of the Bing Maps license for those that are able to take advantage of it.

Conversely, some may think that these prices too good to be true. We don't believe they are – we are simply not used to seeing the type of cost savings that can be made possible through a reasonable and equitable local / state / private sector partnership. The state is also discussing this partnership opportunity with the federal government through the USGS in hopes of reducing the costs to local partners even further.

County Partner Contributions: The lower the overall cost to the county, the fewer additional partners may be needed to help with funding. These include outside agencies such as central dispatch, road commissions, townships, cities and villages as well as regional agencies and other private sector companies that may wish to obtain imagery for internal use.

Savings: If you have too much on your plate already, are short staffed and/or are new to the realm of imagery acquisition, do you really have the time and desire to solicit vendors, manage your own contract and knowledgeably QA/QC the final product? The entire process can easily consume 100-300 hours of county labor resources depending on the rigor of your process. The savings argument can sometimes be difficult to make as these costs are often absorbed in a personnel budget, but they are not trivial in terms of taking a chunk out of your year.

Does this proposal satisfy your imagery needs?

For large, sparsely populated counties (mostly in the upper peninsula) - the total partnership amount needed may still be more than you can afford. However, this is arguably as cheap as it is going to get.

For counties without imagery - if you have never had county-wide imagery, this would be a perfect time to get some. Even if you don't have a functional GIS, there are definite uses for this imagery - whether it is in third party GIS applications like those used in many 911 dispatch centers and equalization departments or by contracting with one of our MiCAMP vendors to turn the raw imagery into a useful hardcopy products such as a county atlases or sectional map sheets.

For mid-size counties that have imagery, most requests for proposals are likely going out for 1' or 6" pixel resolution acquisitions already. Compare the price and specifications in this proposal to your previous acquisition. Given the low cost, will the proposed imagery satisfy your minimal needs if not your exact desires? If you have good 6" for base mapping, perhaps you can do updates using 1' imagery and use the savings to get lidar and generate contours. Much seems to depend on the timing of your last acquisition and when you were planning on acquiring new imagery.

For the wealthy few, it seems that the cost to participate in a 1' acquisition could be largely absorbed in an operational budget to acquire reference imagery every other year in order to keep GIS layer as up to date as possible.

Where does Bing Maps (formerly Virtual Earth) fit in?

Last but certainly not least, a successful program would provide all government entities in Michigan access to the Bing Maps interface. Realistically, about half of the counties in Michigan do not have the resources to take advantage of this component without the help of outside contractors. Thus, the main focus of the decision making should revolve around the imagery component of this proposal. However, for those that have the resources, this is an incredible opportunity to get unrestricted access to the Bing Maps development environment which in and of itself costs at least several thousands of dollars annually if licensed outside of this program. While the Microsoft presentation at last year's MiCAMP conference was a bit over the top in showing what could be done with Bing Maps on an unlimited budget, there are many down to earth applications that can be relatively easily developed by a savvy GIS professional. If you want to develop a GIS web presence but can't afford/support the fairly sophisticated ESRI or MapInfo solutions, perhaps Bing Maps is the answer. Remember though, that access to Bing Maps is contingent on securing enough imagery partners.

What's the catch?

The MiCAMP Board doesn't believe there is one. Microsoft has come a great distance towards accommodating a majority of the state's and county's imagery program needs in terms of cost, imagery specifications, flexibility and limited restrictions on use.

A Call to Action:

As a county GIS decision maker, the outcome of this negotiated proposal is largely in your hands. The state and Microsoft have already stepped up to the plate and are ready to commit. The MiCAMP Board hopes that enough counties (and perhaps the federal government) will do the same. We would also encourage other government entities such as townships and cities to follow through on the call to action below as partnerships with

the state are not necessarily limited to counties and there may be opportunities if the state knows that you want imagery and can contribute funds.

Please take the time to familiarize yourself with all aspects of this proposal by visiting the program website at: <http://www.michigan.gov/cgi/0,1607,7-158--221318--,00.html> where you can find answers to many of your questions you might have. Then respond to the state with a letter/email of intent indicating your ability/interest in participating (yes or no, ideally with a brief rationale), if interested the year you would like to be flown and some indication of a level of confidence that funding is/will be available in that year. This should be sent/emailed to:

Everett Root
CSSTP
517-373-7910
roote@michigan.gov

For even more information about the program, you can participate in a webcast on Thursday, September 10th from 10-11:00 am (info below). To discuss it at length, come to the MiCAMP conference September 16th to 18th where the better part of Thursday's joint session will be devoted to the topic and representatives from the state and Microsoft will be on hand to answer all of your questions. Contact Valdis Kalnins (MiCAMP Secretary) at vkalnins@allegancounty.org for information about or last minute registration to the MiCAMP conference.

Sincerely,
The MiCAMP Board