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FIRST STEPS INTO ELECTRONIC COURT RECORDS
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE 1997 SCANNING PROJECT

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BACKGROUND: The King County Department of Judicial Administration (DJA) is implementing an experimental scanning project as the first stage of its Electronic Court Records (ECR) project. Funds for archival microfilming were eliminated from the 1997 budget. This resulted in a rapid build up of paper file volume. The Scanning Project was originally conceived as a way to use scanning to partially solve the volume build up problem and to gain experience in imaging. The project will achieve these goals. More importantly, it is becoming a laboratory for testing crucial systems and procedures in advance of full implementation of an ECR program. This reduces DJA's risk because before DJA puts its mission critical systems on line with new, advanced technology, it will have tested this technology under load.

GOALS: The specific goals of the project are to set up an electronic imaging system that can scan approximately 2 million pages within the short time of 2-3 months, imaging between 20% to 30% of one year's document filing volume. The imaging system would be an experiment and might or might not be part of the final ECR system. Constraints were that the system would result in little or no "throw-away" hardware or software. Images and index data were not to be wasted and must be exportable to another system if required. Funds were budgeted in 1997 for hardware and software. Over $80,000 was provided for temporary labor for document preparation and scanning.

A STRATEGY TO MINIMIZE POTENTIAL WASTE AND RISK: The plan for accomplishing the goals within the constraints hinged on renting rather than buying imaging software. This allows DJA to discontinue using this software if necessary with a minimum of penalty. Hardware was selected that could be used for other purposes if they later proved to be unessential for ECR. For example, the image server, which is the most expensive piece of hardware in the system, is an IBM RS6000 which belongs to Information Technology Services (ITS) and is located at the ITS facility. DJA is, in effect, renting this unit from ITS. The RS6000stores images on magnetic disks rather than optical disks. The magnetic disks, which are attached to the server, could be used by other County applications should a decision be made to use a different strategy for ECR. Storing the images on magnetic disks makes it easier to export them to other systems than if they were stored on optical media. PC workstations purchased to serve scanning and image retrieval could be used for other purposes. The County Wide Area Network (WAN) and

DJA's Local Area Networks (LAN's) are already in place and can be used for imaging with only minor upgrades.

THE PLAN: The project plan was approved in the first quarter of 1997. The decision to go forward was made in July. The procurement process was begun in August. All major components have now been ordered and are on their way. Installation will occur in the last part of October. This represents a 90 day procurement cycle, quite fast for a government system of this size.

TESTING ECR CONCEPTS: The system will test in advance concepts and procedures involved with many important aspects of ECR. The experience will help DJA to avoid many potential pitfalls. The lessons learned will be invaluable in designing the final system. ITS supports this phased approach under this demonstration project—it will help them, and DJA, to test all components of the system under load. Several major capacities and components will be tested through the Microfilm Replacement Project Scanning:

First of all is **volume**. King County DJA receives and files 7 million pages per year. When this workload goes electronic under ECR, the system will be rivaled among Northwest local government agencies only by the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries (L&I) which has a comparable volume. By scanning 2 million images at a 7 million a year rate (approximately 4,000 images per hour at 7.5 hours per day), we will experience this workload and the problems which come with it. We will know how much labor is required for document preparation, scanning, and quality control. We will determine whether scanners can run at rated speeds for long periods of time. We will have gained valuable experience in advance of developing the details for full-scale ECR.

Second, we will test the system across **geographically separate locations**. We will scan documents in Kent and transmit them to the RS6000 in the Key Tower over the King County Wide Area Network (WAN). We will test connectivity, throughput, and any choke points encountered. We will test simultaneous scanning from RJC and the County Courthouse. Likewise, we will test simultaneous document retrieval across the WAN from multiple locations. In other words, we will test the core concept that the official electronic court file should be accessible by many people simultaneously from multiple, geographically separate locations.

DJA court files must be maintained permanently. We plan to accomplish this in ECR by recording inactive files on microfilm by means of **computer output microfilm (COM)**. COM automatically makes film from document images. During this project we will convert sample files to film using COM to test film quality, cost, and speed. This will help DJA to determine what rate of archival scanning-to-microfilm it can sustain as a component of ECR.

We plan to test downloading selected imaged case documents from the magnetic disks to **CD-ROM disks**. This will be a means of distribution. CD-ROM has potential as a way to make the files available to the public for a fee, as a more cost-efficient way of preparing and presenting Clerk's Papers, and as a way to provide court file documents at workstations not directly connected to ECR.

We intend to test **retrieval of images in many departments**, wherever possible using existing equipment. Loading and testing imaging software on their PC's will help us determine if equipment and WAN/LAN connections already existing can be used, rather than buying all new equipment.

The system will be used to support the **Criminal Pilot Project**.

If possible, we plan to test the essential concept of **the virtual folder**. We will place images and other electronic documents, such as word processed documents, HTML documents, and PDF-format documents into the same folders to see if they can be retrieved and displayed.

If possible, we will test the concept of **integrating or linking SCOMIS with the imaging system**. This might allow users to bring up the record of a case in SCOMIS in one window of their PC screens, and simultaneously bring up the associated document images in the image window on their screens.

We will be able to test **essential mechanics and administration** of the electronic document management system. This will include back-up, assignment of rights to use the system, types of storage and security methods used to manage data on the disks, quality control, and confidentiality of some records.

Finally, The Microfilm Replacement Scanning Project, aside from its stated goals and its role as a test bed, will serve as a **practical demonstration project**. Staff, County departments, users, and the public will see the system function and will know that ECR is real, attainable, and under way.