

NAHMA Analysis

News and Analysis of Breaking Issues in Affordable Housing



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Conversion from Sprint Mail to TRACS Mail

The long awaited, or dreaded, depending on your view; conversion from Sprint Mail to TRACS Mail is under way. To the great relief of many people on the vendor side of our business HUD has decided to split the implementation of TRACS Mail from the implementation of version 2.0.1 B of TRACS.

Last Friday the TRACS Mail user manual was released. We have copies of the manual in both Microsoft Word and Adobe Acrobat format. They are available for download on the NAHMA website in the Members Section, NAHMA Analysis directories. The direct link is:
<http://www.nahma.org/member/analysis.html>

Sprint Mail will operate until February 1, 2002. You can begin transmitting using TRACS Mail on November 1, 2001 if you wish, and your Contract Administrator, if you have one, is set up. If you are one of the few sites still using steam powered DOS based systems it is time to go computer shopping. TRACSMail requires at least a Pentium Class machine using at least Windows 95.

The full implementation schedule published by HUD is as follows.

10/08 - 10/19/2001 TRACSMail - 201A user acceptance testing by the software industry

10/22/2001 Release 201B Industry testing switched to TRACSMail

10/22 - 10/31/2001 TRACSMail - 201A pilot operation - TRACSMail goes live for pilot testers

11/01/2001 TRACSMail - 201A available for use

12/01/2001 Initiate TRACSMail - 201B pilot testing (Note: Early conversion to 201B will be available to those participating in the 201B pilot.)

2/01/2002 Discontinue SprintMail

TRACSMail - 201B available for use

TRACSMail - 201A support continues

4/01/02 Discontinue 201A

Georges Spin - We have a generally good result here. Sprint Mail will be kept an extra two months to allow for an orderly conversion. The implementation of TRACS Mail has been split from the implementation of version 2.0.1 B of TRACS. The software vendors have some breathing room, and while we will have two upgrades right on top of each other, at least we don't have Hanukkah and Christmas in the middle of the conversion which we did under the old schedule.

Depending on the type of software that you use, you may or may not have to spend time reviewing the TRACS Mail manuals. The most popular programs have the mail function working in the background, so you can expect to see an update from your vendor that will handle this transition. If your software does not transmit in the background the new TRACSMail manual is required reading.

The new TRACSMail system is a virtual private network which is both much more modern technology and much more stable. We have recently switched to a VPN for our mail and server remote access here at NAHMA and it is light years better both in stability and fault tolerance.

The one remaining unknown here is the ability of the Contract Administrators to get their software moved over to TRACSMail and get both 2.0.1 A and 2.0.1 B versions of the TRACS Software up and running on their systems. The CA's will have to be able to run dual 2.0.1 A and 2.0.1 B software from February 2002 thru April 2002. We have already been in conversations on this issue, and it will be covered in much more detail in an upcoming Contract Administrator meeting here in Washington later this month. We've reminded the folks at HUD that we need to get all the contract administrators, both old and new onto the system and fully electronic. We have been assured that efforts are being made to get every CA on the new system expeditiously. We will keep you posted on this aspect.

As you look at your conversion, remember that this is the intermediate step on the way to the Internet for TRACS. It is still the intention of HUD to move from this VPN system to a straight internet connection late in 2002. Finally, we have been told by the senior folks running this that if problems come up the schedule will be slipped to accommodate them. Everyone understands that before we cut off the old system the new one has to be working well.