

# 5 Fleet Software Features You Should Be Using

Graphical user interface-based fleet management information systems are 20 years old. You are using yours for more than just record keeping, right?

By Bradley Kelley

**G**raphical user interface (GUI) fleet management information systems (FMIS) emerged nearly 20 years ago, replacing antiquated paper forms that were used to document work performed, parts ordered and issued, fleet inventory, and other core functions of a fleet operation. However, modern FMIS do not merely provide a digital equivalent of these paper forms and lists or store data in an intelligent filing cabinet (relational database). They provide a comprehensive suite of tools designed to support core fleet management functions, as well as enforce business practices, automate activities, aggregate and share data with external systems, and generate actionable information — when properly configured and utilized.

Fleet operations, regardless of size and sector, frequently use the features of their FMIS that meet their basic business needs (e.g., work orders, parts inventory management, and basic reporting) and never deploy the entire solution (e.g., warranty management, shop scheduling, flat-rate labor times, part kits, part catalogs, inventory stocking levels, accident management, motor pool scheduling and administration, key performance indicators and advanced reporting, and interfaces). Organizations often do not realize the full potential of their FMIS, because implementing these features requires a long-term investment in resources to deploy them (e.g., time, people, and funding) and a commitment to change their business practices (i.e., change management, training, workflow, and policy).

## Identify Unused Features & Develop Implementation Plans

To get the most from a fleet system, define a list of features in the system that are not fully implemented or poorly utilized. Select two to four features that can be implemented within a 12-month period, establish an implementation plan with timelines and resources defined, and create an implementation team or teams with the time and resources required for success. If internal resources are not available to develop an implementation plan, contract the software developer or a third-party business advisory to create a comprehensive strategy.

It is important for fleet managers and others to recognize that deploying new system features requires a commitment to modifying business practices and system use. Acknowledge that some people may be averse to changing how they do their job and not everyone is comfortable utilizing technology. As part of developing an implementation plan, it is critical to understand not just how many features can be deployed in 12 months, but also the operation's ability to absorb the changes.

## Valuable FMIS Features to Consider

The following are a few commonly underutilized FMIS features to consider deploying.

1

### Cross-Reference Parts

Parts cross-referencing is a feature every fleet wants, but rarely realizes. Although parts cross-referencing takes time to set up, it is invaluable for identifying supply sources, quickly filling part orders, and maintaining an active healthy inventory.

The key to setting up a parts cross-reference solution is creating an internal part number to which all vendor part numbers are linked. For example, SAE-rated 10W-30 oil should be a generic part number in your FMIS, such as "Oil-10W-30." Dozens of vendor part numbers for SAE-rated 10W-30 oil can be linked to this generic part number and issued as "Oil-10W-30," because they are effectively the same product. More capable FMIS can also link vehicle maintenance reporting standards (VMRS) codes and equipment year, make, and model to specific part numbers.





**2**

**Project Scheduled Services**

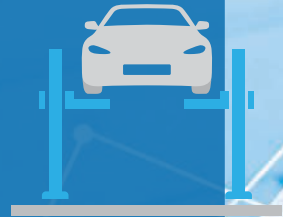
Scheduled services, such as preventive maintenance (PM), can be defined in an FMIS and linked to time and use intervals. Once standard services are established and linked to a vehicle or equipment type, the fleet system can project when an asset is due for standard service. Virtually every FMIS provides this as a core function. However, many FMIS also provide groupings of services hierarchically, associating standard labor times, defining parts lists, and producing a checklist of services to be performed. Some FMIS even provide the ability to schedule appointments and standard services in a calendar, as well as manage shop workload based on technician availability.



**3**

**Manage Downtime**

Downtime is an often misunderstood concept. It is a measure of time during which the vehicle should be available for use but is not due to a repair or service. However, if the vehicle is unavailable during a time in which it was not needed by the assigned user, service time is not considered downtime. Take, for example, a sedan that must be available to a driver 6 a.m.-6 p.m., Monday through Friday. If the sedan is dropped off for service at 5:45 p.m. on Friday and the service is completed by 5 a.m. Monday, the total downtime is 15 minutes because the service was performed off-hours.



Understanding how downtime is measured allows configuring the shift or service hours associated with each fleet asset. Shifts can be linked to individual assets or groups of assets. Use of shifts allows for the accurate calculation of downtime as opposed to a 24/7 clock, which suggests the entire duration of a work order is downtime.

**4**

**Use Ad-Hoc Reports**

Regardless of how good a fleet system's standard reports are, ultimately, an ad-hoc reporting software package will be needed. Custom reports address budget projections, customer information requests, "what-if" scenarios, cost

reduction and control measures, performance and benchmark rankings, and other unique management information requirements.

Virtually every modern fleet management system utilizes a database compliant with open database connectivity (ODBC), a standard method connecting to the database and reading data contained within. An ad hoc report writer (e.g., Tableau), allows users to connect to an FMIS database and create custom reports that can be published or exported to Microsoft Excel and other formats.



**5**

**Measure & Compare with Performance Dashboards**

All fleet operations should measure their performance. Fleet management systems provide real-time performance tracking utilizing dashboards with key performance indicators, such as fleet availability, rate of repeat repairs, service turnaround time, PM compliance rate, and scheduled service rate, among others. This functionality provides fleet managers and their supervisors and customers a quick and intuitive way to gauge organizational performance.



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Bradley Kelley is a sr. vice president of Mercury Associates, Inc., a fleet management consulting firm. He can be reached at [bkelly@mercury-assoc.com](mailto:bkelly@mercury-assoc.com).