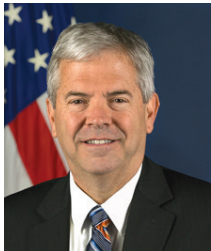


## Executive Viewpoint

# ONE-ON-ONE WITH RICHARD MCKINNEY

Department of Transportation's CIO talks about DoT's move to the cloud.



**RICHARD MCKINNEY**  
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*The Congressional authors of the Federal Information Technology Acquisition Reform Act (FITARA) intended for agencies to have more latitude to utilize cloud technology to save money and modernize agency applications. Richard McKinney, Chief Information Officer at the Department of Transportation, has received high praise from one of the authors of that legislation, Rep. Gerry Connolly (D-VA). Connolly believes McKinney "really gets" the convergence of policy and technology to spark innovation and cost savings in the federal government. McKinney sat down with federal government expert and journalist Francis Rose to talk about DoT's cloud transition.*

**Rose: What is the Transportation Department's assessment of its current systems and transition to the cloud?**

**McKinney:** We're in the middle of transitioning our entire mail and messaging platform to a shared, government-only cloud environment. We've got the messaging side of it operative, and we're working on the planning for the launch of the mail store and the mail boxes, which will probably take place over the next couple months.

**Rose: What is your sense of what the next steps will be?**

**McKinney:** The storage side is easier than the compute side, so I think that's where our next focus will be. We'll also, at some point, begin to move into the compute side as well. I think all of us are looking at what [businesses] we can get out of. If we're going to do it locally and on our own, we have all the accompanying infrastructure underneath it. If we can find good, reliable, secure shared service providers, it simplifies our lives.

I told you we moved our e-mail to the cloud. Now my whole e-mail system automatically

has redundancy. I don't have to think about whether I have a mail store. I don't have to build the platform it rides on. By moving to the cloud, I no longer have to worry about standing up all that infrastructure and providing all that underpinning.

**Rose: Do you still hear hesitations or objections among your colleagues about moving to the cloud?**

**McKinney:** What I sense is a real excitement about the possibilities. Everybody wants to be cautious because you want to be sure that you move into a service that's going to be secure and reliable. We tend to think that we work hard to make sure the infrastructure we provide for ourselves is reliable and secure. If you're going to pick that up and move it to the cloud, you want to feel equally as confident that what you are transitioning to the cloud is going to be well managed and secure.

You also have to keep your options open. You don't want to move something to the cloud and have it be a dead-end street. You want to be able to port that service to another provider down the road if somebody comes along with a better solution or a better shared service. What I feel is we're all very much chomping at the bit to identify these reliable service providers and take advantage of them.

**Rose: Are some of the tools that you need to effectively make cloud transitions and as-a-service transitions included in the FITARA?**

**McKinney:** FITARA is an important piece of the puzzle. I'm trying to use FITARA to get total transparency through the department about how we spend our money. As I better understand that, I believe I'm going to find more opportunities to bundle up the needs of all the various operating administrations and

move a particular set of needs to a shared service provider.

**Rose: Are there some best practices that the government has prepared for transitioning from legacy to modern apps and the cloud?**

**McKinney:** I'm sort of creating as I go along. That's the honest answer. I think it is case-by-case because each app is unique. They have unique histories and were often built slowly over a period of time. We begin with understanding it, and the requirements it's met.

**Rose: When you do a transition like your mail and messaging, how do you assess the success?**

**McKinney:** The day we transition over, if the users are saying, "I didn't know anything happened," that'll be successful. But I also know transitioning to this new solution is going to bring new capabilities. What I'm looking for is the user saying, "These new tools are really great. They're making our job easier and improving our ability to stay in contact with one another," which is especially important in a department like the DoT that has people all over the United States.

**Rose: How are you tackling moving legacy systems—especially the most entrenched systems that are so important to meeting the day-to-day mission requirements of the agency?**

**McKinney:** It's funny that you bring that up, because I was at a meeting recently with one of my operating administrators. We were doing a deep dive into a legacy application, going through it and figuring out what it was going to take to be able to approach the marketplace and modernize this application. There are obviously a lot of thorny issues that come along with those legacy apps. There's a big emphasis now coming from (Federal CIO) Tony Scott and OMB to inventory and understand your legacy applications, and begin to put road

maps together to bring those applications into the 21st century. I came out of that meeting very encouraged that we're going to be able to do that.

**Rose: As you go through that review process, do you ever run across situations where you see an opportunity to use a commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) product?**

**McKinney:** I assume we'll probably run into some where there's a commercial solution that covers it. A lot of these legacy apps are legacy because of the unique business need they were built to address. For most of the replacements, it's going to be a development effort on a modern cloud-based platform.

**Rose: Is there a better way for industry to convey to you that they're able and ready to serve the government's needs? Or is it as simple as "we're FedRAMP certified, so we're approved by the government and good to go?"**

**McKinney:** That goes a long way. A vendor that runs the gauntlet of FedRAMP is obviously serious. It shows that they understand the unique requirements of the government. I think that signals to us that they've made a huge commitment to the cloud.

**Rose: Are you seeing the spectrum of opportunities for shared services that you'd like to see? Some IT professionals in government believe the administration is really pushing shared services, but there's not as big a menu of choices as some folks would like.**

**McKinney:** I think that's true. There's an effort underway right now, in the form of a shared services group. I participated in a meeting recently where they're going through and asking all the departments, "What do you do internally as a shared service? Where are you a provider of a

shared service? Where are you a consumer of a shared service?" I think there's an effort to try to map out the shared service offerings across the federal government, and then put together a more robust menu of possibilities.

**Rose: It sounds to me like that shared services road map could really be a transformational tool for everybody across government to have visibility into who's doing what, and where you can piggyback onto what one of your colleagues is doing someplace else.**

**McKinney:** The Office of Management and Budget is making a very concerted effort to champion that issue and bring all these shared services up to where everybody can see them. Then we can pick and choose, and figure out what's a good match for our businesses, and what we can let go of.

**Rose: What's your sense of the right balance between OMB guiding you and your colleagues through this process, helping you, and providing tools to you and your colleagues, and a more stringent, top-down transformation? I'm not suggesting OMB is doing the latter, just curious about how to strike that balance.**

**McKinney:** I believe that OMB has a role to press us, and to insist that we show them how we're moving in this direction. I don't take that as pressure. I accept it for what it is. They've got a job to do. They're trying to get the most bang for the buck out of the budget, and clearly moving toward shared services is a way for us to eliminate some of our duplicative costs. In these times of tight budgets, I fully expect that would be a focus of theirs, and that they would be prodding us to move in that direction.

**This interview continues at [carahsoft.com/innovation/cloud](http://carahsoft.com/innovation/cloud)**