

The [2019 orthoimagery](#) made available by MassGIS in February of 2020 is the fifth statewide imagery data set we have provided our constituency in the past 20 years. This does not count the statewide [black and white orthoimagery](#) project in the 1990s that took about 7 years (!) to complete. The refresh regularity suggests there has been a state imagery program. However, that has never been the case.

Each refresh resulted from opportunistic coordination by MassGIS, depending heavily on personal contacts in state and federal agencies. Whenever the imagery started to become stale, prospective funding agencies were asked if they could contribute funding for new imagery. In 2016, only one agency, the [State 911 Department](#), was able to provide funding. The lowest cost option that met their needs was [licensed imagery](#) which we used from 2016 to 2019. Twice ([2008](#) and [2013](#)) MassGIS took advantage of free high-quality imagery available from the [US Geological Survey](#) that covered the state's major urban areas. Three times we have partnered with the USGS to procure imagery using a mix of state and federal funding sources. Besides professional contacts, each of these projects required sophisticated understanding of state interagency funding agreements, of procurement procedures, and of how to partner with a federal agency (the U.S. Geological survey).

This lack of predictability in refreshing statewide imagery has often led municipal and regional agencies to acquire imagery on their own, typically at a higher unit cost. Municipal and regional governments sometimes need imagery with higher resolution than the most recent 2019 imagery. However, if there were a state imagery program acquiring imagery on a predictable schedule and with set unit costs, municipalities and regional government agencies could realize significant cost savings through a “buy-up” option. MassGIS will continue promoting interagency coordination on imagery and other GIS issues, including the need for a state imagery program.