

Agenda Item Number 12.E.

Regional Interoperable Communications Projects

Presenter: Byron Vanderpool

Action Recommended: None. Information Only.

Introduction

Just as 9-1-1 is the critical link for the public to gain access to emergency services, public sector service providers rely on their dedicated radio systems to dispatch the appropriate services quickly and coordinate among each other. The ability to communicate is essential in providing day-to-day services and during large scale emergencies. This is a brief overview of some of the local projects that are underway to improve coordination, sharing of infrastructure, locations and opportunities to ensure “**interoperability**”. Public agencies at all levels are making radio system improvement a high priority for the following reasons:

Interoperability - Is the ability of field units and agencies to talk and share data in real time, when needed and authorized. In the past, radio equipment and channels were developed and assigned by agency and in many cases this prevents one agency/field unit from talking to others. It has been well documented that on September 11, 2001, many if not most, of the responding units were unable to communicate with the central incident command responsible for coordinating response to the terrorist caused disaster.

Outdated and un-repairable radio infrastructure - Just as our highways are becoming overcrowded, our available radio spectrum has become clogged with interference and limited numbers of radio channels. In order to increase capacity, the Federal Communications Commission requires that radio channels be split in half by 2013, called “**narrow banding**” This will essentially double the number of available channels, however only recently have radio manufacturers developed the technology to allow this narrow banding. All public safety radio systems will need to move to narrow banding equipment when their systems are replaced or no later than 2013.

Highlights of Local and Regional Projects:

- In 2005, the City of Eugene received a federal COPS Interoperable Communications grant in the amount of \$3M. With this and local match and other investments, EWEB, Lane County Sheriff’s Office, Eugene Police and

Springfield Police departments agreed to develop a shared radio system covering the Eugene/Springfield Metro area and EWEB's territory in the McKenzie River basin.

Eugene and Springfield went operational on the system in early May, LCSO on June 5, and EWEB is approximately 70% finished with their cutover. Other than the normal, minor gremlins of a new system, the system is performing well for the partners.

- In the SAFETEA-LU transportation bill, the 4th Congressional (7-Counties) District received \$9M in federal funding to improve emergency communications along the I-5 and I-101 corridors.

Agreements are in place between Linn, Benton, Lane, Douglas, Coos, Curry and Josephine counties to jointly develop a microwave "backbone", which will allow agencies in these counties to communicate with each other and the state. Also included in the project is a Master Site Controller, a state of the art device which allows radio systems throughout the state to be tied together. This controller is currently in operation and is used as an integral part of the "COPS" system.

- A Communications Subcommittee of the Lane Fire Defense Board has been meeting for several years to jointly coordinate communications between fire and EMS providers, as well as with other service providers. A Department of Homeland Security grant provided funding for a radio consulting firm to develop a fire/EMS communications plan. The first part of the plan was delivered in January of 2007, with the second part of the plan being delivered in June of 2008.
- The West Lane 9-1-1 Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) User Board including Lane County Sheriff's Office, City of Florence, Siuslaw Valley Fire District, Western Lane Ambulance District, Mapleton Fire District, Swisshome/Deadwood Rural Fire Protection District have established an agreement to jointly develop communications facilities on Herman Peak.
- Lane County Public Works is in the process of joining the wide area, shared system developed by EWEB, LCSO, Eugene and Springfield.

Lane County Public Works will be funding enhancements to the system to the West of Eugene, and extending over the Coast Range.

- Benton, Linn and Lane County agencies partnered on a grant application to the Public Safety Interoperable Communications (PSIC). The partners were recently awarded \$2,359,605 to fund radio system improvements in Benton County, Linn County, Herman Peak (Florence), Dead Mountain (Oakridge), Prairie Mountain (west of Eugene), and for fire/EMS users throughout rural Lane County.

- The Oregon Wireless Interoperability Network (OWIN) will replace the Oregon State Police, Oregon Department of Corrections, Oregon Department of Transportation, and Oregon Department of Forestry existing systems with a single, shared system, and provide interoperability with local and regional systems.

Sheriff Burger and representatives from Central Lane Communications have provided direct guidance to the State, and serve on OWIN's management committees.

Observations:

As you can see from the projects highlighted above, Lane County agencies, in particular, are being very successful in obtaining funding and making improvements to their critical radio systems. Several factors are making this possible:

- **Strong Partnerships.** No one agency can go it alone. Agencies are putting ego aside and working closely together to share and cooperate.
- **Good Planning.** Agencies saw the need to plan for their future needs several years ago. As opportunities present themselves, agencies are able to very quickly apply for funding. Since they've already prioritized their needs, they can rapidly focus on the most important system improvements.
- **Solid Leadership.** Policy and staff are providing the leadership necessary to improve the system.
- **Success.** Success breeds success. As each project is successfully completed, granting and other agencies are willing to invest in local projects.
- **Money.** Federal, State and local agencies are making money available to improve public communications infrastructure.