Interoperability & Emergency Communications News Clips
January 9, 2009 – January 23, 2009

Senate nears deal to delay digital TV transition

January 22, 2009
Associated Press
By Joelle Tessler
URL:
http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5gFQTV6u7aQ_ujqqX5bFP5QPRIVgAD95SJ1K09

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate appeared close to agreement late Thursday on a bill to delay next month's planned transition from analog to digital television broadcasting to June 12 — setting the stage for a vote early next week.

Senate Republicans last week blocked Democratic efforts to push back the Feb. 17 deadline for the analog shutoff. The Democrats cited mounting concerns that too many Americans who rely on analog TV sets to pick up over-the-air broadcast signals won't be ready.

The Nielsen Co. said Thursday that more than 6.5 million U.S. households are still not prepared for the upcoming transition and could see their TV sets go dark next month.

"The shameful truth is that we are not poised to do this transition right," said Senate Commerce Committee Chairman John D. Rockefeller, D-W.V., author of the bill to delay the switchover. "We are only weeks away from doing it dreadfully wrong — and leaving consumers with the consequences."

Republicans in both the House and Senate have raised concerns that a delay would confuse consumers, create added costs for television stations that would have to continue broadcasting both analog and digital signals and burden wireless companies and public safety agencies waiting for spectrum that will be freed up by the switch.

But Rockefeller said late Thursday that he had reached a bipartisan compromise and won the crucial support of the committee's top Republican, Kay Bailey Hutchison of Texas.

Rockefeller's bill aims to address Republican concerns by allowing broadcast stations to make the switch from analog to digital signals sooner than the June 12 deadline if they choose to — a provision consistent with the current law mandating a Feb. 17 transition. It would also permit public safety agencies to take over vacant spectrum that has been promised to them as soon as it becomes available.

In 2005, Congress required broadcasters to switch from analog to digital signals, which are more efficient, to free up valuable chunks of wireless spectrum to be used for commercial wireless services and interoperable emergency-response networks.

But President Barack Obama earlier this month called for the transition date to be postponed after the Commerce Department hit a $1.34 billion funding limit for coupons to subsidize digital TV converter boxes for consumers. The boxes, which generally cost between $40 and $80 each

and can be purchased without a coupon, translate digital signals back into analog ones for older TVs.

The National Telecommunications and Information Administration, the arm of the Commerce Department administering the program, is now sending out new coupons only as older, unredeemed ones reach a 90-day expiration date and free up more money for the program. The NTIA had nearly 2.6 million coupon requests on a waiting list as of Wednesday.

If Rockefeller's bill passes the Senate next week, the matter goes next to the House. With the clock ticking down on Feb. 17, the quickest course of action for Congress would be for the House to simply pass the Senate bill.

House Commerce Committee Chairman Henry Waxman, D-Calif., postponed a committee vote on his own proposal to delay the digital transition earlier this week, saying he wanted to wait and see how the debate plays out in the Senate.

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GOP, Dems spar over broadband 'stimulus' and FCC powers
January 22, 2009
CNET News
By Stephanie Condon
URL: http://news.cnet.com/8301-13578_3-10148578-38.html

WASHINGTON--Tempers flared as a key House committee on Thursday pored over tech-related portions of a massive and expensive so-called stimulus package, with Democrats downplaying the lack of any hearings and Republicans calling the rush to a vote the same day an "abomination."

Members of the House of Representatives committee, which is charged with finalizing the portions of the $825 billion legislation that deal with broadband, clean energy, and health care, were deeply divided along partisan lines over the procedures that should be followed. This is one of President Obama's first priorities: his spokesman said on Thursday that "we have to do everything in our power, and Congress does, too, to get that package moving."

The Republicans on the Energy and Commerce Committee said they weren't necessarily opposed to the proposals--instead, they said more time was necessary to review the bill and objected to the idea of approving the largest single spending package in American history with zero hearings. Another sticking point: how much authority the Federal Communications Commission would have over broadband and Net neutrality regulations.

"I respect the right of the new president to have his agenda put before the American people, but I think it is abominable that a bill that is 269 pages is going to be the object of a one-day markup and no hearing," said Joe Barton, the ranking Republican from Texas. "It is truly an insult that we couldn't have several weeks to review this."

Mike Rogers (R-Mich.) added that by not holding hearings, "We have taken away Americans' right to petition their government."

The committee approved the clean energy and broadband portions of the bill, and as of 8 p.m. ET, the rancorous session had moved on to health care and showed no signs of ending anytime soon. A vote on the remainder is expected late Thursday or Friday, with a House floor vote next week.

Democrats, led by Committee Chair Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) said that without action, the economic recession would only accelerate.

"We urgently need an economic recovery package, and we need it immediately," Waxman said.

The tempestuous hearing shows that any honeymoon for the Obama administration may be unusually brief. It was only 48 hours earlier that the incoming president announced "an end to the petty grievances and false promises, the recriminations and worn-out dogmas that for far too long have strangled our politics."

(To be sure, when they were in the minority instead of majority, the Democrats also complained about the same procedural gambits. The former Democratic ranking member of the same committee, John Dingell, accused (PDF) the Republicans of rushing to a vote on an energy bill "with no hearings" and "no process." Other Democrats charged in 2005 that the Republican leadership wanted to "steamroll" legislation through Congress "with no hearings.")

The debate: "Underserved" vs. "Unserved"

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act allocates $6 billion in funding for broadband deployment, with $2.825 billion in grants to be administered by the National Telecommunications Information Administration for "unserved" and "underserved" areas of the country.

Republicans were concerned however, with how "unserved" and "underserved" would be defined, how the funds would be allocated to unserved vs. underserved areas, and whether broadband funding even served the purpose of stimulating the economy.

The broadband portion of the stimulus package "will take years to implement," contended Joseph Pitts (R-Penn.). "The American people deserve better. It's not an economic stimulus, it's primarily a massive spending bill."

The legislation would leave it up to the Federal Communications Commission to define "unserved" and "underserved."

"It's a real tragedy, transferring our ability to make those policy decisions outside of this committee," said Cliff Stearns (R-Fla.). "I don't know how we make any decisions here today when we have no definitions of unserved and underserved."

To mitigate the power handed to the FCC, the committee agreed to an amendment requiring the commission to base its definitions of "underserved" and "unserved" on the information collected under the Broadband Data Collection Act.

"Hopefully we can bring some specificity to what is unserved and underserved," said Bart Stupak (D-Mich.), who introduced the amendment.

After a map of broadband access in the United States is completed, the FCC will have 90 days to define the terms and 45 more days to institute rules and regulations based on the definitions.

Anna Eshoo (D-Calif.) told her colleagues there was no need to get "hung up" on the terms, provoking Steve Buyer (R-Ind.) to pound his desk.

"Definitions are important!" he said, voice raised.

Eshoo also praised the mandate for Net neutrality included in the legislation. The bill stipulates that grant recipients must operate broadband and high-speed wireless networks on an "open access basis." The FCC is charged with defining "open access" within 45 days of the bill's passage into law.

Republicans, however, said the open access requirement could impede the main purpose of the bill--job creation.

Furthermore, the bill "will require the FCC to rush to judgment on some of the most complicated issues facing the communications industry today," Stearns said.

The committee added an amendment to the bill to make broadband grant funding specifically available for interoperable networks for emergency responders. Other amendments made minor adjustments to the eligibility requirements for the funds, while others required additional reports from the FCC and the NTIA on broadband deployment and the impact of the grants.

Obama to Appoint Nation's First CTO
January 22, 2009
Galileo's World
By Janice Partyka
URL: http://uc.gpsworld.com/gpsuc/Utilities+&+Communications+News/Obama-to-Appoint-Nationrsquos-First-CTO/ArticleStandard/Article/detail/576975?contextCategoryId=33826

On Tuesday, the Obama team moved into offices filled with distinction and history. Not long ago, I, along with other leaders of the E9-1-1 Institute, met with members of the transition team in their Washington building to talk about enhanced 911 emergency response. A handwritten sign marked the nondescript building's street address; nothing identified its significance. Visitors moved through extensive security checks into offices barren except for essentials. Hastily written signs designated staff offices within the building.

We talked about broadband infrastructure for all public safety agencies, shared applications, next-generation 911, and ensuring all emergency dispatchers can find callers with location technology. All were concerned about interoperability of emergency communications. The team was interested in determining the cost of these upgrades for the economic stimulus package. The transition team members we met were very technical and well versed in emergency communication issues and included a past FCC bureau chief. One of the transition team members in attendance was focused on the Chief Technology Officer (CTO) position that President Obama is creating. For those of us who see technology as key to economic resurgence, this new position is heartening.

When thinking about what a CTO for the U.S. can realistically accomplish, it is natural to look at the next closest thing, the performance of the president's science advisor. President Bush's appointee, John Marburger, has been the longest serving science advisor since the post was created in 1957.

Last month Marburger created a list of his most significant accomplishments: "A short list would include: helping to establish a science agency within the Department of Homeland Security, working to prevent the reaction to 9/11 from undermining our participation in global science (student visas, 'science vs. security' issues), helping to develop a rational vision for space exploration, …freeing up large blocks of the broadcast spectrum for commercial wireless applications…"

Over the last eight years, many science issues have become politicized, most notably energy, global warming, and stem-cell policy. In December, Barack Obama appointed Harvard physicist John Holdren as science advisor. Holdren is steadfast in his concern for global warming, a departure from the Bush administration's stance. As with a science advisor, the CTO will face politicized and polarizing issues as well.

Speculation abounds as to likely CTO candidates (and yes, the names of Bill Gates and Vint Cerf have been bandied about). There is no dearth of opinions as to the priorities the new CTO should assume. One website, www.obamacto.org, is collecting opinions. This is not a scientific process, but is in any case, interesting. More than 12,000 votes were cast for the top priority being to "ensure the Internet is widely accessible & network neutral." In second place, more than 10,000 votes were placed to "ensure our privacy and repeal the patriot act." The bronze price goes to repealing the digital millennium copyright act.

In his announcement, Obama's broad objectives for the CTO position include supporting network neutrality and open competition on the Internet, deploying a broadband communications infrastructure, and improving America's technologies through fair international trade treatment and science investment. Regarding public safety priorities, his statement includes spurring "the development and deployment of new technologies to promote interoperability, broadband access, and more effective communications among first responders and emergency response systems."

Last Thursday my colleagues and I rushed to review the summary of the draft of the economic stimulus legislation released by the House Appropriations Committee. While money is provided

for public safety, the details have not emerged. $25 billion is slated to go to states for public safety and other critical services. The large amount of money being funneled into states will shore up their budgets so they won't have to critically cut services and conduct massive lay-offs. Another $4 billion is targeted for state and local law enforcement, but nowhere is developing communications interoperability among emergency responders specified. Only $6 billion is set aside for broadband and wireless grants, and these are specified to serve e-commerce, education, and healthcare.

The inaugural parties are over. The balloons are limp. And we'll all go back to fighting for what we think belongs in the stimulus package and hope for a national CTO who will see the big picture.

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Missouri gov halts $80M public safety radio plan
January 21, 2009
Associated Press
By David A. Lieb
URL: http://www.forbes.com/feeds/ap/2009/01/21/ap5946490.html

A more than $80 million project to improve the radio system used by Missouri police, firefighters and other emergency responders has been put on hold by Gov. Jay Nixon.

The contract had been awarded to Motorola Inc. shortly before Gov. Matt Blunt left office Jan. 12. But Nixon's administration quickly put it on hold, leading to the resignation of the project manager and prompting Blunt's former public safety director to raise concerns.

Nixon spokesman Jack Cardetti said Tuesday that the project is complex, lengthy and expensive and was halted as part of Nixon's review of all long-term state contracts. Of particular concern to Nixon is how the state would finance the new radio system, Cardetti said.

"He is committed to building an interoperable system," Cardetti said. "The question is whether this is the most efficient and effective way to do it."

Even though the particular contract is on hold, Nixon plans to recommend an $8.5 million installment for a new radio system - about the same amount as included in the current budget - when he outlines his 2010 budget on Jan. 27, Cardetti said.

The Missouri State Highway Patrol currently uses a 50-year-old radio system that still has vacuum tubes in its transmitters. Few public officials question the need to replace it.

As planned, the patrol's new radio system would be compatible with scores of different communications systems used by local police, fire and ambulance districts. On any given day, Missouri's public safety personnel currently are unable to communicate directly with each other when responding to events affecting various counties or regions.

University looks to Wi-Fi to recover from tornado

January 21, 2009
Urgent Communications
By Lynnette Luna
URL: http://urgentcomm.com/networks_and_systems/news/university-looks-to-wi-fi-0121/

Nearly one year ago, Union University in Jackson, Tenn., was hit by an F4 tornado, which completely destroyed 16 buildings, most of them dormitories, trapping students under crumbled walls and floors and causing more than $40 million in damages. Remarkably, no one was killed. But the university was left to grapple with how it would continue operating that semester when 30 percent of its student housing had been wiped away. It managed to start classes again just 15 days later, thanks to Wi-Fi deployments and a leased hotel nearby.

Aruba Networks donated a Wi-Fi controller and 75 access points, and the network was constructed in a matter of days. "Our goal was getting services to the students they needed to provide normalcy in a process that is anything but normal," said Curt Parish, director of network support for Union University. "We had better support for them than we supplied before with our old (wired) network."

Prior to the tornado, Union University had used Wi-Fi access points to augment its broadband connections, but didn't consider it a primary network. Now the university plans to expand Wi-Fi throughout campus. It proved to be a vital interoperability tool for the National Guard, state and local first responders, and utilities. All were able to plug into an access point and communicate with one another, Parish said. "It was funny. I saw this generator tied to a utility pole and walked around the back to find an access point hanging off a telephone pole," Parish said.

For more sophisticated interoperability, Aruba enables a standard access point to be plugged into a 3G cellular modem to be used for widespread communications. Since April 2008, Aruba Networks has been pushing its Mobile Remote Access Point (RAP) software as a way to help first responder or disaster recovery requirements, and Union University may use that solution as part of its disaster-recovery plan going forward. RAP technology delivers follow-me connectivity to mobile users once the modem is plugged into the access point. The wide area connectivity is provided by a broadband wireless USB modem (including EVDO and HSDP) or Ethernet—or both for high-availability applications. RAP automatically will select the fastest available connection. If one fails it will switch to the surviving connection.

Union University now is in the process of expanding Wi-Fi coverage outdoors throughout the campus and is building a point-to-point network using its bell tower as the launching point. The university has just completed an assessment of how the tornado directly impacted communications. Parish said Wi-Fi definitely would be a part of emergency plans going forward.

Manufacturers successfully test P25 trunking interoperability

January 16, 2009
Urgent Communications
By Glenn Bischoff and Donny Jackson
URL: http://urgentcomm.com/test_and_measurement/news/p25-test-success-0116/

Five radio manufacturers—Motorola, Tait Radio Communications, Tyco Electronics M/A-COM, EFJohnson Technologies, and Technisonic Industries—successfully conducted interoperability tests this week using the Project 25 Phase 1 trunking common air interface. The tests were conducted at Motorola's Schaumburg, Ill., headquarters.

"Everybody set aside their competitive tendencies for the week and worked in a cooperative manner, said Bob Schassler, Motorola's vice president of government and public-safety products.

Testing was done using the same methods required by the Department of Homeland Security, which will recognize vendor test labs later this year as part of the Project 25 Compliance Assessment Program, or CAP. That recognition is expected to be completed for vendor labs by the end of April.

Compliance testing is something that customers have been clamoring for, according to Samantha Hood, Motorola's P25 CAP business manager. "We've gotten a lot of requests from customers saying that they need documented testing and that they need it today," Hood said.

Hood acknowledged that the interoperability capability shown this week has been demonstrated before, but that it had not been documented in such a formal manner previously. "The new part is the testing itself," she said.

Details of the week-long compliance test held this week will be posted on Motorola's web site (www.motorola.com/project 25). Because Motorola's CAP lab has yet to be recognized by DGS, the results will be labeled as preliminary, Hood said.

Despite the lack of recognition from DHS to date, Hood said this week's testing would let public-safety agencies proceed with P25 procurements with confidence. "This will satisfy most of our customers—they just want documentation," she said.

Hood added that Motorola will conduct similar interoperability testing for each new system release. Testing this week was on Astro 25 version 7.6; version 7.7 is expected to be released in June.

Paul May, business development manager for M/A-COM, said his company would conduct similar testing on its systems at the company's Lynchburg, Va., facility. Though establishing and maintaining the individual test labs required a lot of work and a significant financial outlay from each vendor, May said the investment would pay off.

"It's a cost of doing business in the P25 world. Our expectation is that this will expand the market for P25," May said. "Hopefully … we'll be able to spread those costs over a larger installed base."

On the other hand, the labs could save the vendors significant time and money over the long haul, said Andy Davis, Motorola's senior resource manager for P25 engineering support.

"We already have individual customers who are demanding interoperability—which occurs at factory staging and customer acceptance— so this program might save us some work in the long run," Davis said. "We will do testing for every infrastructure release and post the results at the government web site, and we're hoping that customers will all go there instead of asking us, one by one, for the same testing."

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O'Malley outlines state progress on emergency preparedness
January 16, 2009
Baltimore Examiner
By Andrew Cannarsa
URL: http://www.baltimoreexaminer.com/business/011609port.html

As Baltimore officials work with the Secret Service and the Department of Homeland Security to secure the city for President-elect Barack Obama's visit Saturday, Gov. Martin O'Malley and safety officials are working to secure Maryland for the long term.

O'Malley and leaders from the Maryland Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) and other state and federal emergency management officials braved the cold on Thursday at the Port of Baltimore's Cruise Terminal to outline the state's progress on emergency preparedness.

In January 2008, the state commissioned James Lee Witt Associates, a Washington-based crisis management consulting firm, to review Maryland's level of preparedness and offer safety improvement recommendations. The state released the findings on Thursday.

"The report ... is a tough, extensive assessment of both our strengths and weaknesses -- many of which we've already taken steps to correct," O'Malley said. "The need is urgent, and with the forward momentum we've started, we will make progress toward our goal of a safer state for families."

Recommendations for improvement included the state's emergency management authority structure, communications with local jurisdictions, and the state's ability to operate during an emergency if the main Emergency Operations Center becomes unavailable or nonfunctional.

In response to a recommendation from the report, O'Malley said he would introduce legislation that calls for the director of MEMA to report directly to the governor. The change would eliminate any confusion regarding chain of command during an emergency.

Future plans call for a fully interoperable communications system for all local and state public safety and emergency response agencies throughout Maryland. Such a system could take five to seven years to install, O'Malley said.

James Lee Witt, who served as director from the Federal Emergency Management Agency under the Clinton Administration from 1993 to 2001, commended O'Malley for commissioning the safety review.

"These recommendations will not only make Maryland more prepared," Witt said, "but a leader in emergency preparedness in the United States."

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Napolitano cites need to help state, local governments
January 15, 2009
CongressDaily
By Chris Strohm
URL: http://www.nextgov.com/nextgov/ng_20090115_8716.php

President-elect Obama's pick to lead the sprawling Homeland Security Department today pledged to forge better relationships with state and local governments, especially when it comes to dealing with the large price tag of some homeland security-related activities.

Arizona Gov. Janet Napolitano told the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee during her confirmation hearing that one of the main reasons she was selected to lead the department is because she has experience dealing with homeland security issues at the state and local government level.

"The federal government cannot do the homeland security function alone," she said. "That is something that I hope to spend a great deal of effort on."

She indicated she would seek more funding to help state and local governments buy radios that are interoperable, allowing emergency responders to communicate with each other across jurisdictions and during disasters. She said the lack of funding for interoperable radios, along with the lack of technical expertise within the federal government, has stymied efforts in states like Arizona.

"We've got to get this done," she said. "This is something that the department really should take a leadership role on." She also said she, if confirmed, would convene governors to review the so-called Real ID law, which requires states to issue new secure driver's licenses to their citizens. As governor, Napolitano signed a state law rejecting implementation of Real ID.

She said today her main opposition to the program is that it represents an unfunded mandate for the states. But she did not say if she would seek to repeal Real ID. "If it's a matter that needs to be taken up again legislatively, I hope to work with this committee on the necessary improvements," she said.

Napolitano said another priority for her will be improving rail and public transit security. She said she wanted to move fast and come up with ways to make improvements within 90 days.

About border security, Napolitano did not indicate she would make any significant changes to the Bush administration's current efforts. She said the so-called SBInet program, which aims to use technology to control the border, could hold great promise, but affirmed a role for fencing along some parts of the border, in conjunction with technology and Border Patrol agents. But she added she would seek to increase sanctions and prosecutions against employers that hire illegal immigrants. She also said she wants to talk with Defense Secretary Robert Gates to see if the National Guard should return to the border to help with security.

Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Chairman Joseph Lieberman said he believes Napolitano is ready to lead the department. But he said he does not believe an effort would succeed in Congress to reduce the number of committees and subcommittees that the department reports to, which now stands at 86. "It's really not a good situation," he said. "I don't know that we can offer you really the prospect of legislative help on this."

Lieberman said after the hearing he hopes Napolitano will be confirmed by the Senate by Wednesday.

Napolitano to focus on management reform at DHS
January 15, 2009
Federal Times
By Gregg Carlstrom
URL: http://www.federaltimes.com/index.php?S=3903716

Homeland Security Secretary-designate Janet Napolitano says one of her biggest priorities will be reforming the department's notoriously fragmented business practices.

"I want to create a culture where this is a department … not 21 separate agencies," she told members of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee today. "That means the nuts and bolts: acquisition, program management, procurement."

Napolitano seems headed for a quick confirmation early next week. That would put her in charge of a 6-year-old department facing a myriad of management and policy challenges: poor contract oversight, a controversial approach to immigration and a demoralized work force, to name a few. She spent much of the hearing talking about those management challenges, and elaborated on her views in her answers to a lengthy written questionnaire from the committee.

"Many of the [DHS] components operate in a nearly autonomous matter," she wrote. "I intend to review the processes in place in these key areas and work to promote integration among and between DHS and the components."

Senators praised Napolitano for her approach to immigration as Arizona's governor. She signed one of the nation's toughest employer sanctions bills — it penalizes companies that employ illegal immigrants — and told senators the federal government needed to pass similar legislation. And she promised to invest in better training for Border Patrol agents, and better technology along the borders.

She faced a few questions on the department's pay plans. The Bush administration tried to implement two pay-for-performance systems, one at the Transportation Security Administration, and one for the rest of the department. The department-level system, MaxHR, was terminated last year; TSA's remains deeply unpopular.

"These pay-for-performance proposals were resisted by the employees and ultimately blocked by the courts and the Congress because of fairness concerns," said Sen. Daniel Akaka, D-Hawaii. "DHS must improve its ability to recruit and retain skilled employees."

Napolitano promised to review the TSA system, and to work with the department's human capital officers to create better career paths for employees. She said that would combat DHS' retention problems, which are particularly acute at TSA.

Napolitano didn't offer specific thoughts on reorganizing the department. Some experts say the Federal Emergency Management Agency should be removed from DHS and restored to Cabinet-level status. But others — including many members of Congress — say it's an essential part of DHS.
"Detaching FEMA in the vague hope of recapturing some mythical FEMA of long-past days would weaken effectiveness," said Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, the committee's ranking member.

Napolitano didn't explain her plans for FEMA, either in testimony or her written answers. She did promise to work with FEMA "as long as it remains within DHS."

Senators also asked Napolitano about the department's ongoing struggle to improve the department's communications during disasters. The 9/11 Commission's report recommended the government create standards to increase interoperability among first responders. But seven years later, many emergency response organizations still can't talk to each other in an emergency.
"We were appalled when [Hurricane] Katrina struck to find the same lack of interoperability to communicate that we saw on 9/11," Collins said. "It truly costs lives."

The Associated Press reported last week that installing interoperable communications is one of 10 items on Napolitano's homeland security plan for Arizona, yet that still hasn't been done. Napolitano told the committee she didn't have enough federal funding to upgrade communications equipment statewide. She promised to address that as secretary, and also improve the department's science and technology work force.

"I really want to bring some people who are technically savvy to look at this interoperability issue to make sure we're getting the kind of system we really need," she said. "I'm not sure we have the right people.\

New York State Cancels Wireless Network Contract

January 15, 2009
Government Technology
By Matt Williams
URL: http://www.govtech.com/gt/articles/586601

Chalk up another defeat for interoperable communications networks. The New York state Office for Technology (OFT) announced Thursday it has terminated its contract with M/A-COM, the vendor building the statewide wireless public safety network.

The OFT gave M/A-COM notice for payment of a $50 million standby letter of credit, as agreed upon in the contract. Since the contract was awarded in April 2004, the state said it has spent $54 million in operating expenses for the project.

The OFT said M/A-COM failed to cure 15 of 19 deficiencies that were outlined in an Aug. 29, 2008, default letter. Problems outlined in the default notice included high failure rates for mobile radios and other portable devices; multiple site outages that rendered the network unavailable for 43 hours during the July test period; and glitches with the network's uninterrupted roaming feature that in some cases prevented the use of radios for emergency communications. According to the notice, the wireless network failed two earlier tests -- one in fall 2007 and another in spring 2008 -- before another unsuccessful assessment in July 2008.

New York State CIO Melodie Mayberry-Stewart told Government Technology during an interview on Sept. 5, 2008, that she was optimistic the problems could be fixed. Her optimism was apparently dashed on Thursday.

"We are extremely disappointed M/A-COM has failed to demonstrate the reliability of their OpenSky technology, especially its network and subscriber radios, which are the core of the system," said Mayberry-Stewart in a news release. "Per the terms of the contract, we have given M/A-COM every opportunity to remediate existing deficiencies. However, the state's testing concluded M/A-COM is unable to deliver a system that meets the needs of New York State's first responders as stated in the contract."

M/A-COM was acquired in September 2008 by Cobham, a UK-based aerospace and defense developer. Cobham representatives were unavailable for comment Thursday.

Angela Liotta, the acting media relations director of the OFT, told Government Technology that during the most recent testing period in November 2008, the network had 14.5 cumulative hours of downtime for the month, which is well above the U.S. standard of only 52.6 minutes per year. In addition, she said 29 percent of the mobile and portable radios were malfunctioning, which is well above the maximum 3 percent failure rate of a typical consumer product.

"In the consumer world, you would never buy a TV that didn't work 29 percent of the time," Liotta said.

Liotta said the radios' emergency call buttons were doing "kooky" things. Occasionally the system would send an alarm simultaneously to all users' radios, when in actuality nobody sent an alarm.

Craig Settles, a wireless industry analyst, said Thursday that the failure of the New York state wireless network is a good example of why a national public safety network won't work. By the time you start a project, the technology is usually obsolete, he said

"This New York project is pretty good example of that, because when they started the idea four years ago, radio technology was still in vogue -- and with a lot of these old guard folks it still is. It was at the cusp of its sunset because the IP and wireless technology is really where everything is going," Settles said. "It started off with an RFP for a soon-to-be obsolete or a less-than-ideal technology, and then by the time they got to the piloting of it -- not even the deployment -- they realized this isn't going to work."

The OFT said Thursday it is beginning to draw up contingency plans for the wireless public safety network.

"The state's fully committed to delivering a public safety network to our first responders," Liotta said.

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P25 ISSI Readies for Commercial Rollout
January 14, 2009
Radio Resource Magazine
By Paul May
URL: http://www.radioresourcemag.com/onlyonline.cfm?OnlyOnlineID=71

The goal of Project 25 (P25) is to provide an open standard that enables multiagency or regional LMR interoperability and promote full and open competition for the life cycle of a radio network. While the P25 Common Air Interface (CAI) and related trunking standards provide for interoperability on a subscriber radio level, network interoperability requires compliance with the P25 Inter Subsystem Interface (ISSI). The ISSI is the technology that provides network connectivity between P25 networks and allows network administrators the option to connect to other local, regional, statewide or federal networks in the future.

The development of the P25 ISSI standards is being completed in multiple stages or scopes. The ISSI Scope 1 defined the messages and procedures for subscriber mobility management and voice services between P25 networks. ISSI Scope 2 is the augmentation of the ISSI Scope 1 standards to primarily support packet data, console interfaces and supplementary data services. Within Scope 1, mobility management and voice services allow a P25 subscriber to roam to a foreign network, register on that network, and communicate both on the foreign network and back to their home network.

ISSI Scope 2 enhances the capabilities of Scope 1 by allowing a subscriber to have packet data services, including over the air rekeying (OTAR), on the foreign network. Scope 2 also defines ISSI support for trunked or conventional console interfaces and the ISSI support of supplementary data services for subscribers on a foreign network. Supplementary data services are P25-defined data messages for the subscriber and include emergency alarm, call alert, short messages, status query/update, radio unit monitor and radio inhibit/un-inhibit.

The ISSI Scope 1 standards are essentially complete, with the following documentation published as TIA standards:

• TIA-102 BACA; BACA-1; BACA-A; Messages and Procedures for Voice and Mobility Management Services

• TIA-102 CACA; ISSI Measurement Methods for Voice Services

• TIA-102 CACB; ISSI Performance Recommendations for Voice Services

• TIA-102 CACC; ISSI Conformance Test Procedures

The only remaining Scope 1 document, Interoperability Test Procedures, is currently at the comment resolution stage with balloting for publication anticipated by spring. ISSI Scope 2 has substantial standards development work continuing with revisions to the Scope 1 documents circulating in the APCO Project 25 Interface Committee (APIC) task groups to support the additional Scope 2 services. Beyond the Scope 2 efforts, the ISSI task group anticipates continuing standards development work to address security aspects of the ISSI, multicast on ISSI and IPv6 on ISSI.

ISSI Technology
The P25 ISSI is built on IP technologies originally developed for services such as streaming media applications across the Internet. The Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) IETF session initiation protocol (SIP) and session definition protocol (SDP) are used to handle registration and call setup procedures for roaming subscribers. Using the real-time transfer protocol (RTP), ISSI-compliant systems can send communications from P25 unencrypted or encrypted talk groups bidirectionally from a home or foreign system. Both call setup and call communications are transported across a user datagram protocol (UDP)/IPv4 network stack.

In most cases, the ISSI connection between P25 networks will either be a private IP connection — such as 4.9 GHz WiMAX, licensed microwave or fiber — or a virtual private network (VPN) connection across a common carrier — T1 or multiprotocol label switching (MPLS). This IP connection must be in place and operational before ISSI communications between P25 networks can proceed; the ISSI isn't intended to be an ad-hoc protocol that can be used to quickly set up communications on a real-time basis. In all cases, effort should be made to provision the IP connection with a sufficient quality of service (QoS) to maintain sufficient capacity and prevent call blocking of critical communications.

ISSI Call Flow for Voice Services
Subscribers, or radios, are associated with a home system. For example, a radio is linked with RF Sub-System (RFSS) 1. The radio can roam from RFSS 1 to RFSS 2, and using P25 protocols, register on an RFSS 2 site. RFSS 2 processes the P25 over-the-air registration and sends a SIP register message to the radio's home RFSS.

The SIP register message is received and is acknowledged by the home RFSS, which provides information back to the serving (or foreign) RFSS with the radio's characteristics. The serving RFSS assigns the visiting radio a temporary working subscriber unit or user ID. Temporary working group IDs are also assigned when the radio group affiliates using P25 over-the-air messages. Working subscriber unit IDs and working group IDs are required because the number schemes may be different on the two RFSS systems. When the visiting radio initiates a call with push to talk (PTT), the serving RFSS sends a SIP invite message back to the radio's home RFSS.

The home RFSS grants the call back to the serving RFSS with a SIP OK message.

A SIP acknowledgement message is sent back to the home RFSS to finalize the call setup. Dedicated socket ports for the RTP streams are set up on each RFSS, and the call is transported using these dedicated socket ports for PTT, voice packets and unkey messages.

Calls can be terminated by either the home or serving RFSS using the SIP bye message. Typically, the home RFSS terminates the call. Note that these are simplified examples for the generic voice use case. However, the other features supported by the ISSI are performed in a similar manner.

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Richmond council officially adopts Homeland Security system
January 14, 2009
The Voice
By Andrew Benoit
URL: http://www.voicenews.com/stories/011409/loc_20090114034.shtml

Richmond police and fire have been adhering to the National Incident Management System since its inception five years ago.

Recently, the city council came on board when it voted unanimously to adopt a resolution establishing the NIMS, a Homeland Security Directive implemented by President Bush. The system provides a consistent nationwide approach for federal, state and local governments to work together more effectively to prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from domestic incidents, regardless of size, cause or complexity.

According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Web site, NIMS establishes standardized incident management processes, protocols and procedures that all federal, state, tribal, and local responders use to coordinate response actions.

"It's basically a way of communicating. It sets up who is in charge and a chain of command," city manager Jon Moore said. "Since 911, all of the communities are being asked to adopt these procedures."

The Richmond council adopted the resolution Jan. 5.

Peter Locke, of Macomb County Emergency Management, said that as a deterrent, communities who fail to adopt the system would not be eligible for federal grants. He added the system is basically a nationwide language of terms first responders can use and recognize in case of emergencies. Recently updated, NIMS expands on the original version released in March 2004, by clarifying existing NIMS concepts, better incorporating preparedness and planning, and improving the overall readability of the document. The revised document also differentiates between the purposes of NIMS and the National Response Framework (NRF) by identifying how NIMS provides an action template for the management of incidents. The NRF provides the policy structure and mechanisms for national-level policy for incident management.

"The National Incident Management System has been the single most significant improvement in incident management since the Department of Homeland Security was formed in 2003," FEMA Administrator David Paulison said. "It has enhanced interoperability among emergency responders at all levels of government and is the product of a collaborative effort involving hundreds of emergency personnel from across the nation.

"We incorporated lessons learned from Hurricane Katrina, clarified incident command system concepts, increased emphasis on planning and mutual aid, expanded the intelligence/investigation function, and better aligned the NIMS document with the National Response Framework."

Richmond Police Chief Dennis Privette said his department has been following the NIMS for a couple of years. He said so far, the biggest benefit has been in the added preparedness the system has provided.

Moore said the city's fire department has also already been using the NIMS but now the system will eventually reach all levels of authority within the municipality.

"Eventually the fire and police departments, as well as the DPW and the mayor and city manager will be trained for the procedures as well," he said.

Homeland Security Funds Urged for Colorado School Safety
January 14, 2009
PR Web
URL: http://www.prweb.com/releases/school/safety/prweb1864054.htm

Denver, CO -- School Safety Partners is urging Colorado decision-makers to coordinate and leverage Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and other Federal funding in support of a new

law requiring Colorado schools to implement the National Incident Management System (NIMS) to protect students and staff during life-threatening emergencies.

The group has set up a fund to provide financing to school districts for emergency response equipment and technology. For its flagship project, School Safety Partners estimates that it will cost $30 million to install a statewide emergency communications system that would link responders with school personnel by two-way radio. The group proposes that the fund cover this cost now while Colorado pursues, over time, funding from DHS, Department of Education, Department of Justice, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Commerce, the Federal Communications Commission, the Army, and other sources.

At the recommendation of School Safety Partners and the Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance Center, the U.S. Department of Education Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools (OSDFS) released in December revised guidelines for schools to pursue Federal preparedness funding opportunities with local emergency management agencies and authorities such as law enforcement.

The guidelines state that schools should seek funding for interoperability training with their local and regional multi-disciplinary partners, and should reach out to community partners who may already be receiving funds. At the local and regional levels, partners could include local emergency management agencies and Citizen Corps groups.

The new guidelines note that preparedness funding can often be accessed through collaborative efforts within the partnerships developed by schools to implement NIMS. However, because these activities enhance the Unified Command aspect of NIMS, funding support efforts should be led by the State Department of Education and the State Emergency Management or Homeland Security Authority.

To help accelerate the adoption of NIMS by Colorado school districts, School Safety Partners introduced last year a free online project management system that schools can use to manage 15 NIMS implementation activities now required by OSDFS.

Schools are encouraged to be innovative. Preparedness funding can be applied to all four phases of school emergency management: prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery. Monies can help cover the costs of training, safety plan design, and equipment or technology.

In its guidelines, OSDFS explains that local emergency planning councils and committees were established by the Federal Emergency Planning and Community Right-To-Know Act, as Title III of the Superfund Amendments & Reauthorization Act of 1986. Originally, the councils' aim was to understand chemical hazards in the community, develop emergency plans in case of an accidental release, and look for ways to prevent chemical accidents.

In many communities, the planning committees and councils have evolved to use an all-hazards approach that addresses a broad array of emergency management issues on a community-wide level. Some schools have been successful members of their local emergency planning councils

and committees. This represents another potential avenue for sharing information about Federal preparedness funds.

In addition, Schools located within designated Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) zones could inquire about Protective Security Advisors (PSA) who are placed in field offices around the country, representing DHS in local communities and emergency operations centers. PSAs serve as liaisons between DHS, the private sector and Federal, state, local, and tribal entities. Schools can reach out to the PSA in their region to request assistance.

School Safety Partners is an all-volunteer organization that assists in drafting and implementing model school safety legislation, and promoting long-term school safety funding through public-private partnerships. Its online School Safety Portal organizes links to thousands of emergency management resources for schools worldwide.

Texas A&M's active shooter drill 'a community-wide exercise'
January 13, 2009
Security Director News
By Leischen Stelter
URL: http://www.securitydirectornews.com/article/sd200901B2gHjf/Texas%20A&M

COLLEGE STATION, Texas--On Dec. 18, the university ran a full-scale active shooter drill that involved not only university police and personnel, but also local law enforcement agencies, hospitals and emergency responders. "This was a community-wide exercise," said Monica Martinez, emergency planning specialist for the office of safety and security at Texas A&M University. The exercise involved more than 200 responders, 53 volunteer victims and 25 exercise staff who observed and monitored the event.

"We were testing interoperability and how agencies come together," said Martinez. "This was not about just law enforcement, because they know how to respond to an event like this, they train for it. It's about putting it all together and determining if the components can all work in a unit from start to finish: from the 9-1-1 call to transporting patients to putting information out to students and parents and the public."

For its first full-scale exercise, the university created a basic scenario of an active shooter barricaded inside a building. "A concerned person in an office called 9-1-1 and that basically kicked over the first domino and from then on we made no interjections," Martinez said. "You can't dictate too much more from there on."

University dispatchers received the live emergency calls and notified police departments who arrived and set up an incident command post. After law enforcement diffused the situation, EMS personnel began bringing victims out of the building and transferring them to local hospitals. Once at the hospital, victims were processed in order to evaluate the mass-surge capability of the hospitals.

In addition to testing police and hospital response, the university also tested its emergency response process. University dispatchers, after receiving the emergency calls, issued a code maroon and sent out a test of its mass notification system, which included text messages and emails to students and faculty. The university marketing and communications department also formulated statements it would issue to parents and the public, said Martinez. Throughout the drill, the university had people observing the situation as part of the evaluation process.

The exercise, which lasted more than three hours, took nearly one year to prepare for, said Martinez. The university gathered general stakeholders, such as law enforcement and hospital officials, and also worked with the Texas Engineering Extension Service's National Emergency Response and Rescue Training Center to coordinate the event. Officials also consulted other universities who had run similar exercises and gathered information and resources to prepare for this event.

And while the university is still evaluating the outcome of the exercise and awaiting an official report, Martinez said the drill went very smoothly. For other universities' planning an exercise of this scale, she recommended keeping it simple and basic. "We really focused on setting our responders up for success," she said. "These things can get big easy. You have to limit the scope, for the first exercise, anyway. Next time we'll add more kinks."

Switch to 800 MHz system asked
January 13, 2009
Cleveland Daily Banner
By David Davis
URL: http://www.clevelandbanner.com/index.cfm?event=news.view&id=D0DE0F3C-19B9-E2E2-6714DA2C995919EC

Bradley County commissioners were asked to consider joining an emergency communications system so every county in East Tennessee and north to south from Knoxville to Atlanta could have access to a digital communications system.

Bradley County Emergency Management Services Director Troy Spence said switching to the 800 megahertz would reduce emergency response radio communications to a manageable and cost-effective system with the same reliability and coverage as conventional cell phones.

He said there is a shift to improve communications technology to meet Federal Communications Commission requirements of increased reliability. The new standards are enforced by state and federal emergency management agencies and Homeland Security.

"Tying Cleveland and Bradley County to digital will tie us in to an interoperable system," Spence said. "It's something that's mandated, but not only is it mandated, they are putting some dollars with it."

He said adopting the new system would provide seamless transmission for several miles on either side of the I-75 corridor.

"The biggest majority of Cleveland and Bradley County would have excellent coverage from this system," he said.

The digital switch would integrate Bradley County into a $55 million communications system with North Georgia which has contributed $12 million, Chattanooga and Knoxville which have pitched in $20 million each. Another $2.5 million has been paid by other counties involved in the joint venture.

The total cost to outfit the city and county would be approximately $4.2 million for tower locations in Charleston, White Oak, Bean Mountain in Polk County and $638,000 worth of radio equipment. The difference is seamless communications. Currently, first responders must switch from tower to tower to maintain communications. The new system would automatically switch to the best tower location.

"That won't cost us a dime," he said. "We are going to get that money whether we do anything or not."

Spence would like for the city and county to split the cost of $500,000 for purchasing an old MCI site at an elevation of 3,000 feet on Oswald Dome and a second tower location at Crown Colony near Mountain View Holiday Inn.

He said a grant is available, but the MCI tower is on national forest property. Purchasing the tower through the grant would require studies extending beyond the life of the grant. Instead of immediately purchasing the towers, Spence recommended a lease-purchase agreement that would allow his office to search for a grant that would pay for the two sites.

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