

Testimony of:



Before the

Senate Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness
Committee

Senate Communications & Technology Committee

Senate Law & Justice Committee

Hearing on Phase II of the Statewide Radio P25 Project

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Good Morning Chairman Vulakovich, Chairman Costa, Chairman McIlhinney, Chairman Brewster, Chairman Aument, Chairman Haywood and Members of the Committees. My name is John Grappy, Director of Public Safety for the County of Erie, Pennsylvania, alongside me is Michael McGrady, President of MCM Consulting Group, Inc. Thank you for this opportunity to discuss the cooperative relationship between the Pennsylvania State Police – State Radio Network Division and Erie County Government.

History:

Speaking on behalf of Erie County, over the past 30 years, various committees had been established and thousands of dollars spent on independent studies in an effort to address concerns regarding the lack of reliable, interoperable communications within Erie County. The realization of not having reliable, interoperable communications amongst our first responders including neighboring counties and state agencies can best be described by looking at our history. On September 11, 2001, the loss of life of many first responders (police officers, firefighters and emergency medical services) can be directly attributed to the lack of reliable, interoperable communications between our first responders – never hearing the evacuation order.

Recently, closer to home, a strong-armed robbery occurred at a convenience store in western Erie County. The dispatcher announced the call to the local (borough) police department and a high speed chase ensued with mutual aid being provided by the PA State Police and other municipal police departments. The coordination between law enforcement agencies involved in this incident relied on county dispatchers relaying information (suspect / vehicle description, location, direction of travel, etc.) to other dispatch centers due to county and state agencies utilizing disparate communications systems with no interoperability between our first responders.

Study / Recommendations:

In October 2013, Erie County hired MCM Consulting Group, Inc. to conduct a Next Generation Public Safety Radio System Needs Assessment and produce a Strategic Communications Plan. The purpose was to assess our current communications systems and infrastructure, current capabilities including interoperable communications, conduct field interviews with users of our current systems, and develop a plan for future communications systems for public safety users.

One year later, the final report concluded that Erie County did not have a county-wide public safety radio system; rather a fragmented “system of systems” consisting of different frequency bands (Lo-band, VHF, UHF) that failed to provide reliable, interoperable communications between our first responders, the county dispatch center including neighboring counties and state agencies.

The recommendations provided in the final report was to provide a reliable, interoperable communications system amongst public safety users within Erie County, as well as establishing interoperability between neighboring counties and state agencies. The goal of this project is to migrate public safety users to a common platform to provide the most technologically advanced communications system that meets the needs of Erie County in the most cost efficient way.

Solution:

On Tuesday, August 11, 2015, endorsed by our County Executive, Kathy Dahlkemper, Erie County Council passed a capital improvement bond (26.4 Million) for the design, procurement, construction and implementation of the Next Generation Public Safety Radio System. The Next Generation Public Safety Radio System is the second largest capital investment for the protection of our emergency first responders, the citizens and visitors of Erie County.

Our Next Generation Public Safety Radio System will be fully implemented by the end of this year, transitioning all Erie County public safety users onto a P25 Phase II UHF, Digital Trunked, Simul-cast Radio System. As part of our requirements, the successful radio manufacturer had to meet P25 National Standards, ensuring interoperable communications with other P25 radio systems, regardless of radio manufacturer, operating on different frequency bands.

Our new radio system will consist of 17 tower site locations throughout Erie County; eight of the 17 will be new communications towers. In an effort to reduce costs, every attempt was made to identify existing communications towers owned by the city or county, or by an agreement with the PA State Police – State Radio Network Division (SRND). In 2015, Erie County had paid monthly rental fees on commercial communications towers in the amount of \$214,000/year.

Benefits:

Through a collaborative effort between the PA State Police – State Radio Network Division (SRND) and Erie County Government, significant cost savings has been achieved by sharing existing infrastructure owned by the Commonwealth and Erie County Government including, but not limited to, locating equipment and antenna systems on existing state-owned and county-owned tower sites, microwave hops (antennas) between tower site locations, equipment shelters, emergency generators, etc.

This partnership negates the need for the construction of additional tower sites that would have been required to be built by the Commonwealth or Erie County Government to ensure coverage requirements were met. In addition, the Commonwealth maintains a network operations center (NOC) staffed 24 hours per day to monitor mission critical systems such as the State's IP Network. The Commonwealth has agreed to monitor both IP Networks to monitor alarms and make notifications, as needed, to reduce the risk of a network outage between both systems, resulting in additional cost savings to the Commonwealth and Erie County Government. As a result, the cost savings to Erie County tax payers is approximately \$1.957 Million dollars.

This partnership between Erie County and the Commonwealth has extended beyond our county borders. I was asked to speak on behalf of Crawford County as they were unable to attend this morning's hearing. Crawford County has co-located equipment and antenna system on state-owned tower sites and has offered their county-owned tower sites to the state for co-location, if needed. Additional cost savings continue to be realized through collaborative partnerships between the Commonwealth and County Governments.

Conclusion:

The PA State Police went live with their P25 Phase II VHF Radio System in October of 2017 which resulted in improved communications throughout our region including Erie, Crawford and Warren Counties. Erie County's P25 Phase II UHF Radio System, once implemented (later this year), will have an inter sub-system interface (ISSI), which will provide interoperability between our radio systems.

Crawford County is utilizing a county-wide UHF analog radio system; however, their dispatch console system is capable of adding a console sub-system interface (CSSI) to the state radio system. This will allow patching capabilities between the State's P25 Phase II VHF Radio System and the existing Crawford County UHF analog system, achieving interoperable communications between radio systems.

The end result, that does not exist today, is our first responders (police, fire, emergency medical services and emergency management officials) will have a reliable, interoperable communications system amongst public safety users within Erie County, as well as establishing interoperable communications between neighboring counties and state agencies in real-time, by simply turning a knob on their radio. The benefits of having reliable, interoperable communications will undoubtedly protect and save lives of not only our first responders, but to the citizens and visitors of Erie County and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

In closing, Erie County Government appreciates our collaborative relationship with the PA State Police – State Network Division and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. It has been an honor and privilege to provide testimony before your committees.

I would be happy to address any questions.