

**MINUTES OF THE
GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATIONS TASK FORCE**

Thursday, July 10, 2014 – 11:00 a.m.

Uintah County Public Safety Complex 641 East 300 South Suite 200 Vernal, UT

Members Present:

Sen. Wayne A. Harper, Cochair
Rep. Brad L. Dee, Cochair
Sen. Ralph Okerlund
Rep. Douglas V. Sagers
Ms. Melanie Crittenden on behalf of Sherriff Edmunds
Chief Terry Keefe
Chief Mike Mathieu
Mr. Doug Chandler on behalf of Ken Peterson
Mr. Steven H. Proctor
Ms. Tina Scarlet
Sheriff James M. Winder
Captain Alan Workman

Members Absent:

Rep. Mark A. Wheatley
Chief Chris Burbank
Chief Michael H. Jensen
Chief Mike Navarre
Deputy Warden Jerry Pope

Staff Present:

Mr. Joseph T. Wade, Policy Analyst
Ms. Victoria Ashby, Associate General Counsel
Mr. Tim Barber, Legislative Secretary

Note: A list of others present, a copy of related materials, and an audio recording of the meeting can be found at www.le.utah.gov.

1. Task Force Business

Chair Harper called the meeting to order at 11:04 a.m.

2. Overview – Where are we? What is in the works?

Mr. Proctor, Director of the Utah Communications Agency Network, presented “Summary of H.B. 155” and gave an update on the merger of the Utah Communication Authority Network (UCAN), portions of the Utah Department of Technology Services (DTS), and the Utah 911 Committee, information regarding the first meeting of the new organization, and the radio communications part of the Department of Technology Services into the new Utah Communications Authority created by H.B. 155.

Mr. Joe Blaschka, owner, ADCOMM Engineering Company presented “Utah Statewide 800 MHz Upgrade” and an update on his work in preparing a cost estimate and implementation plan for upgrading and expanding the governmental radio communication system in Utah.

The task force answered brief questions regarding the potential costs of a system upgrade. Chair Harper acknowledged that funding will be a challenge, likely around \$114 million, and is hopeful of pursuing a partnership with state, private, and federal funds.

3. Comments from attendees/participants

Mr. Jeremy Raymond, Director, Uintah Fire Districts, expressed concerns about the costs of the upgrade and maintenance. Mr. Raymond also questioned whether an upgrade was needed and if the system is already interoperable. Rep. Dee and Mr. Proctor acknowledged the potential burden of costs but expressed the strengths of an upgraded system. Mr. Proctor expressed that the upgrade will not be a mandate and that the most important factor overall is interoperability

Sherrif Travis Mitchell, Duchene County, questioned what the process will be in regard to communication with personnel who actually use the technology and whether they will have clear direction and instructions. Chair Harper and Rep. Dee expressed that rural representation on the UCA board was included in order to make sure that needs and concerns are addressed and that they hope to avoid mandates.

Mr. Tal Ehlers, Uintah County Emergency Manager, questioned the practicality of the use of 700 MHz systems, Mr. Proctor answered that 700 MHz will be compatible with the 800 MHz, and that 700 MHz has some use for emergency communications from the Federal Communications Commission.

Mr. Ehlers also questioned how UCA will prioritize rural areas of the state where it is not yet known how the system will need to be engineered for the best service. Rep. Dee replied that the task force's purview is to find funding sources, and that technical concerns will be better addressed by the UCA board.

Mr. Eric Isom, Century Link, shared his concern regarding the lack of coordination in strategic plans with private sector and public communication providers. Mr. Isom stated that he does not want to see duplication of private facilities, services, or equipment, and would seek to bring down potential cost through public-private partnership. He asked whether there were any plans or opportunities for meetings to coordinate between public and private entities.

Chair Harper and Rep. Dee shared their expectation that the process of developing a public-private partnership should begin shortly. Rep. Dee stated that the intent of the task force was first to get input from rural communities and then move forward working with vendors.

Sen. Okerlund questioned whether it might be beneficial to have private communication provider representation on the UCA board.

Rep. Dee replied that private provider input will be vital going forward, but that he ultimately decided when crafting H.B. 155 to leave off private providers from the UCA board due to a potential conflict of interest.

Mr. Proctor expressed the importance of the UCA board developing in detail what kind of service they will be seeking out first and then working with private communications providers.

Mr. John Marsh, Chief Deputy, Uintah County, questioned whether the cost estimate will be completed on schedule; whether there has been communication with other jurisdictions that have been using 800 MHz in Colorado, Wyoming, and Arizona; and how it works in different geological conditions. He also shared his concern about costs.

Rep. Dee replied that the UCA board is designed to work through Mr. Marsh's concerns and that the end goal is interoperability, not a mandated 800 MHz upgrade.

Mr. Jeff Goodrich, Chief Operating Officer Strata Networks, expressed his desire to protect his company's investment and work with state entities going forward. He would appreciate an opportunity for rural areas to voice their input in the process.

Mr. Mike Slaw, Systems Communications, expressed concern that smaller, rural areas might not be receiving support for any system disruption in a major disaster if help from the Wasatch front is not available.

Ms. Tammy Twitchell, Emergency Manager, Daggett County, expressed the challenges her county faces with a small allotment of resources due to a small population, despite having large seasonal influxes of tourists. Ms. Twitchell also questioned if the task force had access to each county's tactical interoperability plan.

4. Break with light refreshments

5. Continuation of comments from attendees/participants

Mr. Ken Rasmussen, Daggett County Sheriff's Office, expressed concerns regarding Daggett County's unique geography and the needs to cover the county without congestion. Mr. Rasmussen claimed it would only take one major incident at Flaming Gorge to congest the system. Mr. Rasmussen expressed financial concerns with upgrades and very limited resources in the county and skepticism of their financial ability to upgrade to 800 MHz.

Chief Mathieu discussed with Mr. Rasmussen some of the transfer of costs and functionality from the Department of Technology Services to UCA. He said it creates a dilemma for county emergency entities and that state lawmakers need to address.

Rep. Sagers questioned if regional dispatch would be beneficial in their situation and Mr. Rasmussen clarified it is already in place.

Mr. Proctor expressed his organization's commitment to helping Mr. Rasmussen navigate the problems his county faces.

Mr. Scott Adams, Gold Cross Ambulance, questioned if there are plans for coverage and operability testing to be done before investment is made in system upgrades. Mr. Proctor clarified that there will be ample testing.

Mr. Rob Tidcome, University of Utah, expressed his concerns of potential television translator interference issues. Chair Harper committed that the issue of television translators and public safety will be on a future agenda.

Mr. Keith Campbell Assistant Chief, Vernal City Police, expressed concerns that 800 MHz upgrade is not going to be cost effective because of new infrastructure and requisite environmental review.

Sheriff Mitchell, Duchene County, expressed that he is aware of some operability problems in other rural counties like Cache County, and hopes those same problems wouldn't be carried over and of disconnect between administration and officers on the street.

Mr. Proctor expressed skepticism about concerns being raised from rumors as justification for delaying an upgrade and would prefer reports, data, and documentation of specific events or, alternatively, that concerned parties speak with entities that have experienced upgrades.

Mr. Terry Stringham, member of the public, suggested that private cellular companies have a good idea of where coverage is available and where it will not.

Mr. Bartley Bailey, Undersheriff, Washington County, stated that their county is overall happier with 800 MHz than VHF, even with some remaining questions about long term costs. Mr. Bailey mentioned their current challenges include: search and rescue, volunteers' radio coordination, and interoperability.

Mr. John Marsh, Uintah chief deputy, questioned the possibility of some kind of user fee and whether it would help address financial woes in providing these services and upgrades

Rep. Dee commented that he has experience in sponsoring legislation concerning 911 fees and is not opposed to studying those fees as a possible funding mechanism again.

6. Other items/adjourn

MOTION: Chief Mathieu moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

Chair Harper adjourned the meeting at 2:25 p.m.