

AGENDA NOTE – HRPDC EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

ITEM 22: HAMPTON ROADS COMMUNICATIONS INTEROPERABILITY

SUBJECT:

At the May 19, 2011 HRPDC Executive Committee meeting, Commissioner Clifton Hayes requested a presentation on the state of interoperable communications in the region.

BACKGROUND:

In 2003, the Hampton Roads Tactical Regional Area Network (HRTacRAN) was conceived and the HRPDC received grant funds to develop a highly survivable regional microwave system. The HRTacRAN is a public safety grade microwave network that supports the Land Mobile Radio Systems providing regional communications interoperability supports a Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) phone system and a secure collaboration tool that allows for instantaneous conference bridge setup and First Responder Alert through the use of an Automated Distribution Messaging system. It also provides the core architecture for linking the designated sites with key Federal, State and local agencies in the Hampton Roads area. This regional system leverages existing tower infrastructure capabilities by installing a redundant microwave network between designated sites in Virginia Beach, Chesapeake, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Suffolk, Hampton, Newport News, and York/James City County, Williamsburg, Gloucester, Franklin, Isle of Wight, Surry, Southampton, Poquoson and the Coast Guard Integrated Command Center, the Virginia Emergency Operations Center in Richmond, as well as the WHRO facility in Norfolk. This dedicated communications framework is the keystone for providing the reliable high-bandwidth backbone for the voice, video, and data systems needed during high stress or disaster related periods. The HRTacRAN is the backbone to another regional public safety communications system known as the Overlay Regional Inter-Operability Network (ORION) which provides a regional interoperability network for Command, Control & Communications (C3). Finally it also supports the HR Tactical Interoperability Communications Plan (TICP) and the Commonwealth's State Interoperability Communications Plan (SICP).

Starting in 2003 with grant funds, a microwave network known as the HRTacRAN was built with the HRPDC staff being the lead on the project. Since the system was built and the initial contracts expired, ownership and responsibility of this system has never been fully established. Additionally, multiple homeland security grants worth millions of dollars have been acquired to build out ORION which relies on the HRTacRAN as its base infrastructure. These grant funds have been assigned to multiple jurisdictions which has resulted in challenges in coordinating the projects for the Hampton Roads Interoperability Communications Advisory Committee (HRICAC) and the ORION Steering Group. To complicate matters, because the HRTacRAN was built with Port Security Grant funds, other Homeland Security Grant funds cannot be utilized to maintain the system per the DHS grant guidelines on sustainment.

HRPDC Emergency Management Administrator Richard Flannery will brief the Commission on the current status of interoperable communications in Hampton Roads.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Approve the Executive Director and staff to work with the Chief Administrative Officers to develop a local funding and management solution to maintain and sustain the interoperable communications networks, if HRPDC is unsuccessful in obtaining grant support.

STAFF COMMENTARY:

The HRICAC and regional staffs have worked diligently for nearly 3 years to find a funding solution through various Homeland Security Grant fund programs to maintain and sustain the HRTacRAN to no avail. The FY09 Port Security Grant Program did approve the HRPDC's project proposal for nearly \$1 million dollars (+25% in-kind/cash match) to maintain and sustain the HRTacRAN. However, the Department of Homeland Security has yet to award these funds and the period of performance for this grant year expires in June 2012; leaving nearly no time to procure services. Also, the HRICAC and staff have recently submitted a State Homeland Security Grant Project proposal for FY11 that would fund a Regional Interoperability Coordinator position to manage all the various grants and projects associated with interoperability in Hampton Roads. This would relieve some of the burden on the localities communications staff.