

REGIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Friday, April 13, 2007, 10:00 a.m.
City Hall Council Chambers
St. Cloud, MN

MEMBERS PRESENT: The following RAC members and alternates were present: Tom Hannon, Micah Myers (City of St. Cloud); Pat Bettenberg and Troy Heck (Benton County); John Haukos (Big Stone County); Tom Egan and Kevin Smith (Douglas County); Stacey “Ace” Bonnema (Kandiyohi County); Mike Hirman and Jeff Norlin (Meeker County); John Olson and Ken Brown (Sherburne County); Jay Sikkink (Stearns County); Scott Mattison (Swift County); Peter Mikkelson (Todd County); Bill Swing and Greg Howell (Wright County); Debbie Backes (City of St. Cloud, Recording Secretary).

MEMBERS ABSENT: Morrison County.

GUESTS PRESENT: Bill Mund, Gary Fletcher, and Perry Biese (City of St. Cloud); Tim Lee (MnDOT); Judy Siggerud and Mark Englund (Ottertail County); Tom Larson (Pope County); Wally Strand (Meeker County); Brad Bennett (Benton County); Steve Berg and Phil Thinesen (Wright County); Rachel Leonard (Sherburne County); Mike Kahl, Dan McCoy, and Andy Faith (Granite Electronics); Frank Karnauskas (KARNS Services); David Sissen (W/C Communications); Jack Kritzeck (Geo-Comm).

Training started at 10:10 a.m.

As requested by the RAC members at the March meeting, arrangements have been made to provide training sessions to assist participants interested in acquiring greater knowledge of radio systems, trunking, talk groups, and fleet planning.

Training Sessions

Training: “Radio 101 & Trunking 101” presented by Frank Karnauskas, Karns Inc.

Training: “Talk Groups and Fleet Plan Development” presented by Frank Karnauskas, Karns, Inc.

Training concluded at 12:00 p.m.

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Meeting called to order at 12:30 p.m.

INTRODUCTIONS:

Tom stated a quorum was present and introductions were conducted.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Micah Myers moved, second John Olson to approve minutes of March 9, 2007, motion carried.

COMMUNICATIONS:

Douglas County presented a letter requesting membership in the RAC and appointing a member delegate and alternate. Ace Bonnema moved, second by Jay Sikkink to approve the Douglas County request for membership in the RAC, motion carried. Tom Egan stated they are very pleased to be a part of the RAC and look forward to working with the group.

REPORTS:

SRB/ARMER UPDATE:

Tim Lee stated they are continuing to install sites in the Rochester and St. Cloud districts for the phase 3 ARMER buildout. The equipment is in at the Kimball site which will be run through the Metro zone controller at this time. Work on the new zone controller for central Minnesota is progressing. MnDOT is currently waiting to determine legislative action on the statewide buildout before proceeding with the Twin Cities Metro Interop plan as that area may be upgraded to the new zone controller software version. MnDOT is on schedule for completion of the phase 3 buildout.

Tim Lee stated there is \$300,000 - \$400,000 available funding in the SRB budget. One potential use includes adding the Holdingford site to the St. Cloud metro area simulcast system. This will require upgrades to both the planned Holdingford site (\$140,000) and the existing sites in the St Cloud metro area (\$85,000) to provide for a simulcast system change from a 3-site 8 channel system to a 4-site 9 channel system. This change to the plan will provide for more effective and efficient frequency use throughout central Minnesota and will provide the additional channels required for the added sites in central Minnesota.

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REPORTS: (CONTINUED)

SRB/ARMER UPDATE: (CONTINUED)

Under this plan the St Cloud metro simulcast system will have both 700 and 800 MHz channels operational. Tim Lee advised the RAC that this was one of the recommendations from both the OTC and the Finance Committee that will be presented to the SRB.

John Olson stated he saw a proposed site in the plan located in Princeton and asked the status. Tim Lee stated MnDOT currently is only working on phase 3 development but they are preparing to start immediately on phase 4 and 5 if the legislation passes, including securing land for the new sites.

Bill Mund, Chair of the SRB Finance Committee, reported to the RAC on recent meetings of the SRB Finance Committee. He stated they will be looking at purchasing consolettes and he explained the usage of the consolettes. Bill Mund also stated there may be funds left to add two additional channels to the Kimball site due to anticipated capacity issues. This enhancement will affect Meeker, Wright and Stearns County. Bill stated these recommendations will be addressed by the SRB next week and added that all the funds need to be encumbered by June 30th of this year. He also reported that both the OTC and the Finance Committee have made the same recommendations.

Bill Mund further stated that the legislation providing for funding of the immediate statewide buildout of the ARMER system and provision of backbone support is passing through the various committees of the legislature with little conflict. He feels the outlook is very good for this legislation.

OTC Update:

Micah Myers stated the OTC met twice since our last RAC meeting. Curt Gullickson, Micah Myers and Jay Sikkink attended the last OTC meeting. In addition to the issues already presented the OTC addressed standard 3.6 Use of Statewide Emergency Management Talkgroup providing for a statewide talk group for Emergency Management. The OTC provided modifications to the draft standard so it will be operational statewide. Jay Sikkink added he felt there was also a need for a statewide talk group for Public Health Emergency Management.

Jay Sikkink observed that once Holdingford is added to the St Cloud metro area simulcast system, Morrison County coverage will be improved from that site. This one sub-system will have an impact on coverage in five counties in central Minnesota and he expressed concerns regarding system capacity issues affecting regional users. He further stated a second tower in Todd County was of concern as the original phase 3 plan did not include the northern portion of Todd. He observed that only providing for coverage in half of Todd County makes it difficult at best for local government units to even consider using the system in that area until it has been expanded to include the entire county. Jay Sikkink informed the RAC that the Republican National Convention will be in Minneapolis next year and the communications planning for this event may require a freeze on changes to systems during that timeframe.

Micah Myers reported that the OTC suggested that the RAC appoint an alternate member to that committee in addition to the current member, Curt Gullickson. Micah Myers suggested the RAC consider appointing Scott Mattison from Swift County to be the alternate to the OTC. After discussion Scott Mattison was appointed as the RAC member alternate to the SRB OTC.

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REPORTS: (CONTINUED)

Interop Sub-Committee:

Jay Sikkink reported on the activities of the Interop sub-committee. He reported that the St. Cloud Hospital's security staff is getting radios and there was a lot of discussion on how to communicate with them. The Interop sub-committee recommendation will be to create a "hailing channel" to initiate communication with the St Cloud Hospital Security staff, and then the hospital would need to revert to the individual agency's talk group. Tom Hannon stated the Hospital would need to get approval from each entity to use their talkgroups as required by RAC standards and secure the approval of the St Cloud simulcast system operator for the addition of any new talkgroups.

Jay Sikkink met with MnDOT this week to review zoning issues on tower placement and location. He suggested that RAC members assist MnDOT in the process wherever possible to ensure systems that operate as needed. Tim Lee explained the site acquisition process followed by MnDOT, including the public hearing process and local involvement. He explained that the State Attorney General has advised MnDOT that state government is not subject to local zoning and planning regulations. As a result MnDOT conducts public hearings and tries to incorporate local issues and concerns into the site plan where possible.

Jay Sikkink reported that another area of concern addressed at both the last OTC and Interop sub-committee meetings is the cell phone jammers installed in some theaters to prohibit use of cell phones. These devices may also jam public safety radios and prevent proper operation in and around these locations. The Interop sub-committee strongly suggests all RAC member agencies test their radios in areas around theaters to ensure proper operation. Tim Lee stated he thought the jammers are illegal but acknowledged that some theaters do have them.

Tom Hannon asked if the Interop sub-committee has been getting participation from other RAC member agencies at the meetings. Jay responded that he believes a number of other RAC member agencies have been attending recently. He stated that all RAC member agencies are welcome and encouraged to send user representatives to the Interop sub-committee meetings. The next meeting is April 26th, 6:30 p.m. at the Albany Fire Hall. The Interop sub-committee alternates its meetings providing an evening one month and a workday meeting the next month to get as much participation as possible.

Standards and Policy sub-committee:

The sub-committee did not provide any review of previously adopted interim standards at this meeting.

Discussion and Recommendation Standard 5.4:

Micah Myers and Jay Sikkink reported on the development of standard 5.4, Non-governmental use for emergency coordination. Jay Sikkink stated the objective is to provide for a non-governmental agency to be sponsored by a governmental agency to come onto the system i.e. railroad, hospital, etc. to provide for emergency coordination operations between private sector entities and public sector emergency responders. The standards and policy sub-committee modified the language in the standard adopted by the SRB and MESB to provide for inclusion of the RAC committees and process.

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REPORTS: (CONTINUED)

Discussion and Recommendation Standard 5.4: (Continued)

They added under section 4 – recommended protocol standard in reference to fleet maps and the inclusion of the user committee. Micah stated MESB is dealing with the financial expense of the devices utilized. The sub-committee recommended adoption by the RAC.

Tom clarified that anything adopted by the RAC is only adopted on an interim basis pending creation of the Regional Radio Board. The RRB will have final authority over all standards and policies.

Motion by John Olson, second by Bill Swing to accept the recommendation of the Standards and Policy sub-committee and adopt the 5.4 Standard Governing Non-Governmental Use of the System on an interim basis pending action by the Regional Radio Board. Motion unanimously carried.

REGIONAL RADIO BOARD CREATION:

The chair indicated that nine of the RAC member jurisdictions have completed approval of the Joint Powers Agreement creating the Regional Radio Board by their governing bodies. Benton, Kandiyohi, Meeker, Morrison, Sherburne, Stearns, Todd and Wright counties and the City of St. Cloud have all secured approval. The Big Stone and Swift county boards will be acting on the agreement at the May meeting. Douglas County has not yet scheduled it for consideration. The convening meeting can be scheduled and the Board created. He requested all members to notify Debbie Backes by email of the contact information for all appointed Board members and alternates.

There was discussion regarding planning for the first Board meeting. Consensus developed to schedule the first meeting in late May or early June and hold it at St. Cloud City Council Chambers. The meeting will be broadcast on local cable TV and recorded for re-broadcast throughout the region. Bill Swing asked about a tentative date for June and it was the consensus that Monday's and Tuesday's would not work well due to county board and city council meetings. The group felt a morning meeting (suggested 10:00 AM) on a Wednesday or Thursday would probably work best.

The RAC felt that it would be appropriate to request the Chair of the Statewide Radio Board to act as convener and to invite the Governor. Bill Mund reported on his discussions with DPS and SRB regarding ideas and concepts from the March meeting where he had suggested the RAC consider asking the Governor to sign the statewide funding bill at the first Board meeting.

The group decided it would like to get the Governor here to sign the bill and have it take place at the first Board meeting. The following sub-committee was created to work on plan development for the first Board meeting: Tom Hannon, Bill Swing, John Olson with Bill Mund, and St. Cloud Mayor Kleis assisting to plan the convening meeting of the State Radio Board. The sub-committee will present preliminary plans to the RAC at the next meeting on May 18th in Benton County.

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UPDATES FROM PARTNERS ON CURRENT PROJECTS:

Wright and Sherburne Planning Project Update:

Bill Swing stated currently they have a proposal from Geo-Comm to complete the previous planning project started by PSC Alliance. Wright, Sherburne, RAC Chair and Geo-Comm will meet following the RAC meeting to discuss the proposal.

Todd Pieper indicated that after completion of the meeting with Wright and Sherburne counties referred to by Bill Swing, Geo-Comm will provide a date for both the Sherburne/Wright plan and the Regional Plan. Bill Swing asked if Wright and Sherburne have the approval from the RAC to continue with their plan. The chair indicated it was approved at the March meeting.

Kandiyohi, Meeker, and Todd Planning Project Update:

Mike Mazzitello was at Todd County last night for a meeting with all the agencies. Ace reported that Kandiyohi County is waiting for Geo-Comm's preliminary report. They are also waiting to hear back on a fire grant. Todd Pieper informed the RAC that preliminary reports for Kandiyohi, Meeker and Todd counties will be available by May 18th, with Rey Freeman meeting again very soon with Kandiyohi County agencies.

Swift, Big Stone, Douglas and Morrison County Planning Issues:

The chair indicated that Big Stone, Douglas and Swift counties have not yet engaged in the formal planning process and that Morrison County plan development could be an issue the RAC should address when the legislature passes the statewide buildout. This will move Morrison County up in the buildout schedule and it should have a plan developed.

Scott Mattison stated he had a second Sheriff's Task Force planning meeting. He indicated the County Board is in total support of the planning efforts and has passed a resolution supporting planning and declaring it's intention to approve the Radio Board Agreement. He further reported that he is now on a State Interop Planning Committee. He updated the committee on the LA Conference he recently attended on Interop Planning.

John Haukos reported he had a "heads up" meeting with the County Board and next month will be addressing the joint powers agreement and anticipates it to be passed. He is working on securing the Homeland Security Grant that Big Stone County already has been awarded and has been checking with their Fire Departments to see what their needs are internally. He stated that it appeared both Big Stone and Swift counties would be utilizing the agreement between Kandiyohi County and Geo-Comm for planning services and would be asking for approval of this committee for reimbursement funding for planning expenses.

Regional Plan Update:

Todd stated once Wright and Sherburne County plans are finished, they would like to form a planning committee with a representative from each jurisdiction to assist in final plan development. The chair reminded Geo-Comm that a significant issue and concern of the RAC is to adequately plan for including the other regional counties that currently do not have a plan in place. The Regional Plan needs to be developed so it can be easily updated and completed plans for future jurisdictions can be integrated into the final plan.

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Items of Interest:

List Serve:

Jay stated Stearns County recently switched to a new listserv and they have made the service available to the RAC to help manage the numerous lists that were required to be maintained. The existing lists have converted and both he and Debbie Backes have the ability to update the listserv. A number of lists have been created for the RAC. The various lists are utilized by subject topics. Once individuals register emails can be sent to the following groups: Interop, Cmnusers, RAC, RAC members, and Other. He stated they just need to utilize a “:” and emails can be sent to cmn800mhzlist.

Conference:

Tim Lee stated April 30 – May 2nd there is a conference in St. Cloud and details are available on the Sheriff’s Association website.

User Committee:

Bill Swing stated they have their five assignments to the user group already. The chair suggested the remaining entities start considering their appointments to the User Committee so the group can start meeting. Jay Sikkink stated the User Committee needs to start working on their by-laws and is currently working with Tom Hannon on this using the RAC by-laws as a guideline.

The Chair suggested the RAC may want to discuss the process for selecting the RAC member to serve on the Radio Board at the next meeting.

Simulcast System:

Jay Sikkink stated next week the Police Chief’s meeting will be in St. Cloud and there may be testing of radios which could result in extra traffic. Tim Lee felt this would not be a problem as only local and regional talk groups should work on the sub-system.

GENERAL DISCUSSION AND NEW BUSINESS:

Training, Grant Fund Allocation:

Jay Sikkink has received notification that the state curriculum for radio training has been approved and that training now qualifies for use of grant funding. Discussion followed on various training funding issues including the role of the RAC in providing funding for training evolutions. The following appeared to be the consensus of the group:

- Training is a critical component of interoperable communications provision.
- The RAC should encourage every agency to include training in grant applications as a mandatory component.
- The role of the RAC should be limited to setting standards and assessing effectiveness of training.
- The RAC may desire to provide “train the trainer” radio communications training from existing grant funding but should not engage in providing direct agency training support. For example, the RAC may decide to provide training for one to two trainers per member jurisdiction.

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GENERAL DISCUSSION AND NEW BUSINESS: (CONTINUED)

Training, Grant Fund Allocation: (Continued)

- The RAC should assess participation in training projects in a manner that is equitable to all members of the RAC.
- The provision and management of training issues should be addressed in the Regional Plan.
- The RAC should wait until the Regional Plan has been developed and assess future infrastructure needs prior to making any commitment to fund training from existing grant funds.

UPCOMING MEETING, SET DATE, AND LOCATION:

Next meeting will be Friday, May 18 at Benton County (Foley) at 10:00 a.m. The June meeting is tentatively set for Sherburne County (Elk River) on June 8th.

Motion by John Olson, second by Pat Bettenberg to adjourn at 2:25 p.m.