

# Statewide Public Safety Communications System Planning Project FAQ



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## What is the purpose of the Statewide Public Safety Communications System project?

Recognizing the importance of protecting public safety and welfare, the General Assembly of the State of Vermont enacted Act 78 (the appropriations act for FY 2024), which stated that “it is in the public interest to establish a statewide reliable, secure, and interoperable public safety communications system, comprising integrated 911 call-taking and regional dispatch systems, and to ensure that the system is equitably and sustainably financed and universally accessible by all persons throughout the State.” (Source: [Section C.114 PUBLIC SAFETY COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM](#)). Through this project, the State will transition to such a public safety communications system.

## Who is responsible for the project?

The General Assembly temporarily established the Public Safety Communications Task Force (“Task Force”) to oversee and manage all phases of the communications system’s development, design, and implementation. All Task Force members have an equal say and vote in determining how to best advance the Project and final recommendations regarding the interoperable public safety communications system. You can contact the Task Force at [DPS.PSCTaskForce@vermont.gov](mailto:DPS.PSCTaskForce@vermont.gov).

## How were Task Force members selected?

The Act that established the Task Force stipulated that it be comprised of the following seven members. Specific individuals were selected by their respective organizations where appropriate:

- (A) **the Executive Director of the Enhanced 911 Board, who serves as Co-Chair:** Barbara Neal, Executive Director, Vermont Enhanced 911 Board
- (B) **the Commissioner of Public Safety or designee, who serves as Co-Chair:** Jennifer Morrison, Commissioner, Vermont Department of Public Safety or designee
- (C) **one municipal official appointed by the Executive Director of the Vermont League of Cities and Towns:** Mike Doenges, Mayor, City of Rutland
- (D) **one representative from a public safety answering point overseen by a municipal police department appointed by the Vermont Association of Chiefs of Police:** Jim Mack, Public Safety Answering Point Administrator, Shelburne Police Department
- (E) **one emergency medical technician or paramedic appointed by the Vermont State Ambulance Association:** Michael J. Wright, Chief Executive Officer, CALEX Ambulance Service
- (F) **one firefighter appointed by the Vermont State Firefighters’ Association:** Ron Kumetz, Chief, Alburgh Volunteer Fire Department

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(G) **the Chair of the Regional Dispatch Working Group established by the General Assembly in 2022 Acts and Resolves No. 185.:** Paul White, Selectboard, Barre Town / Chair, Vermont Regional Dispatch Working Group

The Act additionally required that the Task Force elect a vice chair from among its members. The Task Force selected Paul White for this position.

## What is the project's budget?

The Vermont General Assembly appropriated \$11,000,000 from the General Fund to the Department of Public Safety to facilitate the Statewide Public Safety Communications System project. A portion of these funds are designated to assist the Task Force with project management and administration, and to assemble critical data and information from the public safety stakeholder community to best inform the Task Force and to develop various communications system implementation models. Based on the analysis of the options to establish the statewide communications, the Task Force will determine the optimal implementation strategy. Pilot projects may be initiated to further evaluate candidate implementation models. The Commissioner of Public Safety will consult with the Task Force when developing a plan to allocate the remaining funding.

## How is the project incorporating stakeholder input?

The success of the project is anchored on the participation of the public safety stakeholder community, and interested stakeholders have opportunities to engage beyond only attending [public meetings](#). As part of the project, the project team will interact directly with dispatch centers to learn about their capabilities, and to gather relevant information to best inform the progress and advancement of interoperable communications systems throughout the state. Project outreach will be conducted directly with the statewide public safety community through the 38 Vermont PSAP and dispatch facilities, and via a structured survey, and over the course of multiple facilitated public meetings. The Task Force has no preconceived notion of the future structure of the Vermont statewide communications system, and the community's input is essential to determining how this communications system will look and how it will be managed and governed.

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## Is an independent review of the System Planning Project required?

An independent review of the System Planning Project is not required until funding is designated for investment. Any projects that trigger independent review according to the State of Vermont Agency of Administration Bulletin 3.5 will be reviewed accordingly.

## What is the current public safety communications landscape in Vermont?

In Vermont, emergency communications dispatching services are provided by approximately 38 dispatch centers throughout the State. The Vermont Enhanced 911 Board has partnered with six of these centers to serve as Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) that provide 911 call taking services in addition to dispatching services. Two PSAPs are located at Vermont State Police facilities within the Department of Public Safety (DPS) in Williston and Westminister. Four regional facilities located at the St. Albans, Hartford and Shelburne Police Departments and the Lamoille County Sheriff's Department serve as the other four PSAPs. Each of these PSAPs provides dispatch service to various agencies and also forwards calls to other dispatch centers that provide local area dispatching services. These other centers vary in size, as some dispatch for a single municipality/town, while others may support multiple municipalities/towns in a region. The operational procedures and standards followed by these centers for dispatching activities may also vary as they are not governed by a common entity and statewide standards do not currently exist.

While DPS does not charge agencies for dispatch services, other dispatch centers must charge the agencies they dispatch for in order to operate their facilities. This creates an inequity whereby some municipalities receive dispatching services at no cost, while other municipalities must pay a fee.

There are many Land Mobile Radio (LMR) networks in Vermont, used by the different dispatch organizations to reach their responders. In any given area there are generally separate networks for fire and medical response in the VHF band, and law enforcement in the UHF band.

The Vermont Department of Public Safety (DPS) also maintains several LMR networks. The most critical of these is the network for the Vermont State Police (VSP); a conventional analog network in the UHF band with 10 separate zones, one for each VSP barracks / field station coverage area. DPS also maintains statewide networks for other state agencies, including AoT and F&W in VHF. Because of the broad coverage of these networks, they are monitored by most law enforcement agencies and also relied upon for backup communications by many agencies. DPS also maintains the VCOMM network for interoperability. This network utilizes LMR frequencies set aside for interoperability

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nationwide to provide a common platform for major incidents and to allow responders to reach assistance when their primary LMR network is unavailable.

## Does Vermont currently have any documented statewide dispatch center operational standards?

The State of Vermont does not currently have documented dispatch center standards. However, the Vermont Enhanced 911 Board has adopted rules governing the technical and operational standards for the statewide 911 system and has adopted robust training and call handling requirements for all Vermont 911 call-takers employed at the six PSAPs.

Dispatch centers are not under the purview of the Enhanced 911 Board and are free to implement their own respective operational standards. In conjunction with the System Planning project, the dispatch center technical and operational standards will be identified.

## What is the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Grant Program and how does it relate to the System Planning Project?

An additional \$9,000,000 of federally allocated funding to enhance public safety communications has also been secured by the Vermont Department of Public Safety. These funds are separate from those allocated by the Vermont General Assembly and are intended to improve the resilience, redundancy, and reliability of the State of Vermont Land Mobile Radio (LMR) network and enhance performance for all agencies that utilize the network. In determining how best to allocate these federal funds, the Commissioner of Public Safety will solicit recommendations from the Public Safety Communications Task Force to ensure the allocation respects the spending guidelines for these funds and seamlessly coordinates with the activities of the system planning project.

## How can stakeholders learn about project status and progress?

Information from the Task Force can be found on the Task Force's website at <https://dps.vermont.gov/committees-boards/communications>. This includes [project information](#)

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[and status reports](#) and [meeting information](#) (including information to attend these public meetings, agendas, minutes, and transcripts).

You can contact the Task Force at [DPS.PSCTaskForce@vermont.gov](mailto:DPS.PSCTaskForce@vermont.gov).

## What consultants/vendors are involved in the project? What are their credentials?

The Task Force has developed [RFPs](#) and awarded contracts to support different elements of the project.

**Project management support** has been awarded to Televate, LLC. Televate specializes in public safety communications technology and engineering, including land mobile radio, wireless broadband networks and applications, Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP), and information technology and communications. Televate's role includes coordinating activities between the selected communications system vendor and the Task Force and the statewide stakeholders, providing regular project status reports, managing project risks as they are encountered, and maintaining the project schedule.

**Communications system planning** has been awarded to Mission Critical Partners (MCP). MCP is an independent consulting and IT support services firm that helps clients enhance and evolve their mission critical communications systems and operations through their extensive experience, knowledge, and resources. MCP will perform extensive stakeholder outreach and conduct a comprehensive inventory and assessment of all aspects of dispatch service currently provided in Vermont. Based on the input from the statewide stakeholder community, MCP will develop multiple potential models for the establishment of a statewide, reliable, secure, and interoperable public safety communications system, comprising integrated 911 call-taking and regional dispatch systems.