



State of Vermont
Department of Public Safety
45 State Drive
Waterbury, Vermont 05671-1300
<http://dps.vermont.gov/>

Regional Dispatch Working Group Agenda / Meeting Minutes

Date: July 27, 2022

Time: 9:00-10:00 EST

1. Introductions

- a. This is considered an open meeting. The link has been provided to the public via the DPS Committees and Boards website.
- b. Working Group Members listed below

Regional Dispatch Working Group Members present:

- Lance Burnham
- Paul White
- Brian Peete
- George Merkel
- Drew Hazelton
- Robert Schalacher
- Mark Anderson
- Barbara Neal

Admin Support present:

- Mandy Wooster

Members of the Public present:

- Steven Whitaker

Regional Dispatch Working Group Members absent:

- Jack Helm
- Anthony Cambridge



2. Review of legislation - How do we sustain Regional Dispatch?

Sec. E.209.1 PUBLIC SAFETY – VERMONT STATE POLICE; DISPATCH WORKING GROUP; TRANSITION PROPOSAL; REPORT

(a) Creation. The Commissioner of the Department of Public Safety shall convene a working group on the new regional dispatch model. The working group shall provide a written report to the Governor and the General Assembly on or before December 1, 2022. The report shall include recommendations on:

- (1) The long-term funding model for regional dispatch that fairly assesses costs statewide, does not unduly affect property taxes, and clearly identifies the potential impact on property taxes;
- (2) The estimated timeline and transition funding needed as new regional dispatch centers come online and local dispatch services are transitioned away from State-operated facilities.
- (3) Identify the reduction in workload that will result at the two Vermont State Policy dispatch centers from a fully operational regional dispatch model.

(b) Membership. The working group shall be composed of the following members:

- (1) one representative of the Vermont State Police, selected by the Commissioner of Public Safety;
- (2) two representatives of local legislative bodies, selected by the Vermont League of Cities and Towns, one of which utilizes a State-dispatch center and one of which utilizes an existing regional or local dispatch center;
- (3) one representative of an existing local or regional dispatch center, selected by the Vermont League of Cities and Towns;
- (4) two police chiefs, selected by the Vermont Police Chiefs Association, one of whom utilizes a State-dispatch center and one of whom utilizes an existing regional or local dispatch center;
- (5) one emergency medical responder, selected by the Vermont EMS Advisory Committee;
- (6) one firefighter, selected by the Vermont State Firefighters Association;
- (7) one sheriff, selected by the Vermont Sheriffs Association; and
- (8) one representative of the Enhanced 911 Board, selected by the Board Chair.

(c) Powers and Duties. The working group shall:

- (1) Consider and document how current dispatch services are provided statewide and the various methods of funding that exist to cover the cost of dispatch services. This shall include detail by town and or by emergency service provider. This analysis shall identify any funding inequities that exist in the current system between those entities paying for services using local funds and those entities receiving dispatch services provided by the State without cost. The analysis of current costs and payments flows for dispatch services shall be compared to the projected costs and payment flows under the new regional dispatch model. This analysis shall also estimate how first responder entities dispatched through the new regional system may be financially impacted in the transition to the new regional system.
- (2) Identify a transitional timeline and the tasks to be completed within that timeline for transitioning to the new regional dispatch model.



(3) Identify any State resources that may become available once the new dispatch system is fully operational and recommend if and how such resources should be distributed to equitably reduce local costs.

(4) Identify any other ongoing sources of statewide revenue to be dedicated to statewide emergency response communications to equitably reduce local costs.

(b) \$11,000,000 is appropriated from the General Fund to the Department of Public Safety for regional dispatch funding. The funds are subject to the following conditions:

(1) \$4,500,000 shall be held in reserve until the report required by Sec. E.209.1 of this act is submitted and further approval to expend the funds is granted by the General Assembly.

(2) \$6,500,000 to provide grants to regional dispatch facilities upon approval of the Joint Fiscal Committee subsequent to review of a Regional Dispatch Facility grant plan submitted by the Commissioner of Public Safety. The plan shall include the extent to which federal funding sources may be available for regional dispatch.

(d) Meetings.

(1) The Commissioner of Public Safety or designee shall call the first meeting of the working group.

(2) The working group shall determine its chair from among the members of the working group.

(3) A majority of the membership shall constitute a quorum.

(e) Assistance. The working group shall have the administrative, technical, and legal assistance of the Department of Public Safety.

Discussion:

Lance Burnham: Current dispatch capabilities are operating at a 46% vacancy rate. Commissioner Schirling got the ball rolling 2.5 years ago with a proposed fee structure. This did not get momentum in the legislative session. Commissioner Schirling wanted to move forward with the recommendations of studies to regional dispatch centers and the proposed \$11 million. The grant cycle is expected to open this week and Commissioner Morrison is set to go before JFO in September. We have agencies that want to take advantage of the funds for regional dispatch. The question is, how do we fund this long-term? The membership of this workgroup will bring a lot to the table.

Mark Anderson: Agencies in southern Vermont look at this opportunity as a last resort to improve emergency communications / public service. We want to help solve the problem. The Sheriff's Association is also committed to solving public concerns about equal and adequate access. There are fundamental disagreements on how this is funded.

Brian Peete: Currently running a quasi-regional dispatch with ~20 towns and municipalities. There is aging infrastructure at the verge of collapse. Wants to help the State and improve infrastructure dedicated to make sure this process works and doesn't fall solely on VSP. Has concerns on how this will be funded and what costs will look like – ensuring smaller agencies won't be bankrupt.



George Merkel: Small departments are overly dependent on VSP. He represents agencies that will be adversely impacted. Vergennes pays taxes to cover the PD and this is asking them to incur another expense. If we have to incur another expense, we may lose 1-2 positions. He spoke with other small agency heads and left with these questions:

- What do we need for dispatch services? How many across the State?
- If willing to step up, where are these centers going to be located and who are they willing to cover?
- How are we going to pay for the services (tax across the State)?

Can't risk losing staffing. This has been a challenging for many years. Want to make sure we cover our bases and to ensure it will be operationally feasible.

Paul White: The end goal is to acknowledge and document that dispatch is a public safety function and that the State bears some responsibility. There is a perception (accurate or not) among smaller municipalities that some are subsidizing by charging other towns at a higher cost for services to keep their own rates down. Need to focus on equitable expense per capita – those not providing the service should not be charged more.

Lance Burnham: Charging / funding sources are challenging to figure out. Not against the group looking at a base fee structure (broad state tax). Need to come up with a fee structure and be able to explain how we came up with it.

Brian Peete: Need to consider the trust factor – where we are supplementing funds. May need a recommendation of an in-depth board with reps from different areas – behold to the group to look at structure. CVPSA is fundamentally sound, but the execution did not work. Perhaps a governance board – an essential body not just political interest.

George Merkel: Agrees with Brian Peete, if we had a board made up with equal membership across the board and be able to articulate how we came up with it. This is going to cost money.

Mark Anderson: There are several models (sub regional, state level, etc.). We need to consider a tax, Universal funds, 911/phone funds, etc. We are talking about critical government infrastructure including public safety. Many need to consider a regional or count tax. Depending on the population, need to look at resources for tax base ability to pay an increase. Consider the hub and spoke model for tourism at a minimum and regional funding model and determine how to fund, then turn it over to governance.

Barbara Neal: The Universal Service Fund has been supporting 911 since 1995. The fee is 2.4% on retail telecommunications sales in Vermont (land, cell, prepaid, etc.). The fund is managed by the Public Service Department. Once collected, the funds are distributed in a hierarchical manner to several entities before being applied to 911. There is not enough money in the fund to support all areas and not enough funding is left to fund 911. 911 has gotten supplemental general funds. There has been lots of discussion in legislation about changing the structure instead of 2.4% change it to a per line fee based on the number of lines. The line fee determines how much money you will have. There was no change last legislative session. The 911 system needs to be funded. Could that mechanism support regional dispatch? Hope that the programs stay distinct. The Universal Services fund is about \$6 million where 911 is \$4.8-5 million per year.



Paul White: Keeping them distinct would create movement for DPS to move from dispatching.

Lance Burnham: The State does not intend to shed 911.

Barbara Neal: Regional dispatch is not assumed to be all centers but there is a hope to move to one stage emergency dispatching in the future. It is best practice to have 911 calls answered and dispatched out of one facility. It would save 50-60 seconds of transfer time. In Vermont, 50% of calls are dispatched and transferred. Would like to consider the value of the new centers becoming 911.

Paul White: Barre Town left Barre City partly because of Lamoille's ability to also answer 911 calls – the fact that the services are all under one roof was a selling factor.

George Merkel: It is prudent to look into the future with this as a goal.

Mark Anderson: Funding should not be on the backs of municipalities unless this is a tax or fee.

George Merkel: As part of the Department of Homeland Security selection committee, municipalities have requested money from the system. Suggest that we prioritize that money over grant cycles to establish what we need and allow it to be a priority for funding. If we spread the cost of the program over the entire state verses regionalize it will be an easier lift. It will be easier for everyone to pay.

Brian Peete: There is an agency within the State that is being fully funded by those funds. That speaks to the level of funding DPS has. Recommended that the State absorb that function verses pulling from that pot of money.

Lance Burnham: When Rutland opens a centralized station it will take a significant number of agencies. Want to make sure that they don't take on all the agencies and then add 911 causing an unduly amount of work.

Mark Anderson: Need to address potential failures of dispatch center. We need to rely on other centers but lack the technical infrastructure to do so. Must prepare for failure of a dispatch center and allow for roll over. We need interconnectivity that allows systems to talk.

George Merkel: We need to determine what the max capacity of the dispatch centers are (ex. Shelburne). We need to identify the challenges the State centers are facing and plan how to get there while avoiding these issues. Setting up the infrastructure will take time.

Brian Peete: Continuity of operations is significant.

Lance Burnham: We need to ensure the infrastructure has the capability to take over.

George Merkel: Will the State continue to maintain the towers?

Lance Burnham: That has been the message received.



Stephen Whitaker: (Comments provided via email) "I've spent a lot of time on this topic, I ask you to consider that this is about emergency communications. It's not about just about dispatch. So you will need to, as phrased in the legislation of putting forth of full funding model, you're going to need to address the origination of calls which is the gaps in the LTE coverage. You're behind the eight ball because the Department of Public Service has not completed a telecom plan it decades. The 911 system you've covered and LMR are all in the cost of upgrading and maintaining the radio infrastructure that Brian Peete referred. But that needs to be built into this cost and that work has not been done either.

Where, in the state are the system's already. Where will there need to be in-fill? (Both LMR and LTE) Where will there need to be replacements, and those costs. So that design work and that costing has to be done in order for you to put a credible, financial ask before the legislature. Similarly, Utility (radio) Communications are part of restoring the power to these sites and we need to plan for hurricanes knocking down half of the cell towers.

And how are we going to put together those plans and those costs? What's the role of the state microwave? Now? And maintaining the LifeLine.

As we're standing up these new Regional dispatch sites, where are the call takers and dispatchers assumed to be coming from? If the Department of Public Safety is 48 to 54 percent down? Are we just assuming that we're going to have an attractive benefits package and Union that's going to attract people from other parts of the country to take on these jobs.

Again, Brian Peete mentioned failover, or he called it "continuity of operations" But each PSAP, dispatch site needs to be paired with a failover site, that has the --- potentially even the same screen layout and switches so that the staffing from one site can immediately take a seat at the non-failed site and be productive without training.

That that is the type of detailed planning that needs to be happening here. Clearly there needs to be a path to PSAP and the revenue that entails.

So this is it basically integrated communications planning beyond just who's going to radio the First Responders in the trucks. This is - it's within our reach to install publicly owned small cells in these dead zones, but no one wants to talk about it, especially the Department, but those things are \$15K-\$20K a piece and those will provide that absolutely essential Broadband (coverage with priority and preemption) that FirstNet and Verizon and T-Mobile can provide for automatic vehicle location, personnel locations, mapping drone video, etc.

So it's all about the governance. You touched on this but I don't think - that did not make it into the legislation - that the regional governance model in central Vermont has failed. It's a sham. So you need to in effect have the member paying municipalities owning a seat at the table and voting on and holding accountable, both the revenues and the mistakes of these centers.

So that's enough for now, I will speak to some of you offline."



3. Nominations / Identification of the Working Group Chair

Chair Nominations:

Brian Peete nominated Paul White as Chair of the Regional Dispatch Working Group.

George Merkel seconded the nomination of Paul White.

All members of the group were in favor of the nomination.

No members voiced opposition to the nomination.

Paul White to be the Chair of the Regional Dispatch Working Group.

4. Next steps... (Meeting interval, agendas, meeting minutes, etc.)

Regular meetings will be held on Wednesdays from 8:30-10:00 hours via the Teams platform. The link to the meeting will be posted on the agenda.

Until further notice all meetings will be held remotely via the Microsoft Teams platform via the following link/contact number:

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Member	Contact Information	Criteria
Captain Commissioner Justice Services Burnham Legal Counsel Services	lance.burnham@vermont.gov Tel 802 244-8786 FAX 802 241-5557 Tel 802 244-6941 FAX 802 241-5377 Tel 802 244-8763 FAX 802 241-5553	Vermont State Representative of the Vermont State Police, Secretary of the Commission of Public Safety, Internal Affairs Tel 802 244-5194 FAX 802 241-5377 Administrative Safety Tel 802 479-7561 FAX 802 479-7562



Jack Helm	Selectboard Benson Jdhelm4422@gmail.com	(2) two representatives of local legislative bodies, selected by the Vermont League of Cities and Towns, one of which utilizes a State-dispatch center and one of which utilizes an existing regional or local dispatch center
Paul White	Selectboard Barre Town pwhite@barretown.org	
Chief Brian Peete	Montpelier PD Bpeete@montpelier-vt.org	(3) one representative of an existing local or regional dispatch center, selected by the Vermont League of Cities and Towns
George Merkel	Vergennes PD george.merkel@vermont.gov	4) two police chiefs, selected by the Vermont Police Chiefs Association, one of whom utilizes a State-dispatch center and one of whom utilizes an existing regional or local dispatch center
Anthony Cambridge	Hinesburg PD Anthony.cambridge@vermont.gov	
Drew Hazelton	EMS Advisory Committee dhazelton@rescueinc.org	5) one emergency medical responder, selected by the Vermont EMS Advisory Committee
Robert Schalacher	Vermont State Firefighter Association schlacfire@aol.com Robert.Schalacher@vermont.gov	(6) one firefighter, selected by the Vermont State Firefighters Association
Mark Anderson	Windham County Sheriff manderso@windhamcountyvt.gov	7) one sheriff, selected by the Vermont Sheriffs Association
Barbara Neal	Vermont Enhanced 911 Board barbara.neal@vermont.gov	8) one representative of the Enhanced 911 Board, selected by the Board Chair

