



Oregon Wireless Interoperability Network Recommendations

There is no question concerning the need to replace the state's public safety wireless networks. This necessary investment in new telecommunications infrastructure provides an opportunity to address a number of needs as well as an opportunity to develop a new public-private partnership model to finance it. The State Interoperability Executive Council (SIEC) in accordance with instructions from the 2005 legislature developed the current Oregon Wireless Interoperability Network (OWIN) plan.

The Oregon Telecommunications Coordinating Council (ORTCC) recommends that the legislature modify the scope of their instructions to the SIEC to take into account three significant opportunities.

1. Improved interoperability, public safety and reduced costs are likely to result from sharing of towers, tower sites and network facilities. The ORTCC recommends that SIEC work with one or more rural counties off the I-5 corridor to develop a model for building a solution from the bottom up, planning tower sites with both state and local needs in mind with real joint planning, not just an opportunity for local first responders to have the option to buy access to a state government network.
2. Focus on public-private partnership arrangements—which may be essential to making the economics work. The current plan may have the unintended consequence of precluding private sector investment in the deployment of new multi-purpose wireless networks or shared tower sites in rural Oregon, while making state costs unnecessarily high. It would be harmful to economic development in rural areas of the state to remove major potential anchor tenant customers for a general-purpose network or shared network infrastructure.
3. Use the RFP process to explore options for a new network that will support mobile broadband public safety applications statewide. OWIN design/requirements/investments should not preclude the use of mobile broadband data for public safety applications for both urban and rural areas of the state. OWIN should investigate potential partnerships with private sector partners of mobile broadband data. OWIN should also include in the RFP an opportunity for responders to bid creative public-private partnerships to provide mobile broadband data. Under the current conceptual design, only the most populated regions of the state (I-5 corridor) would benefit from P25 data rates using 700 MHz. Areas outside the I-5 corridor would not benefit because P25 radios in the 150 MHz band do not support broadband data.

Recommendations:

1. Earmark a portion of planning funds for a joint planning effort and possible pilot or trial implementation in one or more rural counties that addresses these three opportunities. This approach would be more likely to result in a solution that will be supported by both state and local public safety organizations.
2. The legislature should ask the SIEC to consider the ORTCC “Guidelines for Transforming Public Safety Communications in Oregon” to drive development and evaluation of any public safety telecommunications plan. The guidelines and a thorough discussion of public safety communications best practices are found in the “Report of the Oregon Telecommunications Coordinating Council”, November 28, 2006, <http://www.ortcc.org/PDF/ORTCCReportJLCIMT20063final.pdf>, pages 32 - 54.