



July 31, 2006

Mr. Sean McSpaden  
SIEC Technical Committee Chair  
IT Investment Management Program  
DAS – IRMD  
1225 Ferry Street SE  
Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Sean:

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the Statewide Interoperability Executive Council (SIEC) efforts to improve public safety communications in Oregon. In your letter of July 18, 2006 that announced the findings of Federal Engineering, you requested input. While we are not in a position to comment to the level of detail you requested in your questions (pages 6 & 7), we would like to take this opportunity to share several observations.

Meeting the state's public safety telecommunications needs are critical to the future of Oregonians no matter where they live in our state. In Oregon we have many issues to address, including: aging systems, the need for widespread interoperability of technology, for cooperation among public entities at multiple levels of government (federal, state, local), concerns for communications with public health and medical professionals in the event of a pandemic, and understanding the full range of participants in public safety responses, especially to major disasters such as a tsunami or pandemic. Public safety is not just law enforcement or fire response, but also includes utilities, healthcare and other government agencies.

The Oregon Telecommunications Coordinating Council (ORTCC) strongly supports the efforts underway to address our many critical public safety interoperability needs. We also believe there is a great "once in a lifetime" opportunity to evaluate the use of a variety of proven technologies to meet system needs and to fully understand the implications of an expanded definition of who is involved with public safety. How we address the many facets of this critical challenge will determine the safety of all Oregonians.

The Joint Legislative Committee on Information Management and Technology (JLCIMT) has asked the ORTCC to consider the public safety telecommunications (PST) topic as part of its ongoing mandate to study and make telecommunications policy recommendations to the legislature. The Council's report to the JLCIMT in November will contain a full and detailed set of recommendations. We salute the investment of energy and creativity by many and we also salute the standards-based "systems of systems" approach. Rather than wait for the delivery of our final report to the JLCIMT, we believe it to be important to share at this time comments brought to our attention in public meetings on apparent trends in the current activities in the state regarding PST.

- **SIEC mission**

The original mission of the SIEC seems to have turned from that of establishing statewide

public safety interoperability to one of a narrow pursuit of implementing a technical communications solution to meet the communications needs of four state agencies. The proposed solution has become more technology specific than needs based. We suggest that there should be a return to a broader approach to cooperation among the different organizations (more than the four currently being addressed) involved in public safety in Oregon and a technical plan that is responsive to a broader set of needs and users.

- **Communication of benefits**

Based on the recent distributed Federal Engineering report it would appear that the projected investment of an early estimate of \$500 million to gain 1% additional coverage (currently at 84% with 171 antennas and shifts to 85% with 183 sites), albeit with the increase in interoperability among the 4 departments, is perceived as a troubling outcome for use of taxpayer dollars. Significant work is needed to communicate the value of this proposition to the taxpayers.

- **Redundancy**

It would appear reasonable to evaluate alternative technologies (e.g., fiber) to provide signals to antenna sites in addition to the microwave installations. The security of a meshed network composed of a pure microwave backbone segments is subject to reasonable questions as to its overall robustness. Antennae are notoriously subject to ravages of weather, earthquakes and floods. Additionally, if we are concerned about the possible activities of terrorists, then we need to add additional alternatives for redundancy into the proposed of the system. The location of every microwave antenna in the system is available by law in the public database of the Federal Communications Commission. This information includes an accurate location using precise geographic coordinates, the radio frequencies utilized, and the radio paths involved.

- **Building expanded value**

Building yet another special purpose network in the state financed with public funds deserves a critical review, especially when alternative network architectures could provide for opportunities to include education, healthcare and other government network applications without compromising security or performance. Technology has evolved to a point where some of the valid security reasons given in the past for keeping public safety networks in a separate silo are no longer valid. The amount of funds required for consolidating and upgrading four state agency networks might be better spent on a network solution that permits a broader range of users while also providing a larger user base to support the costs.

- **Public and potential partner input**

The approach that has emerged has resulted in expressions of dissatisfaction from a number of critical public safety entities in outlying regions of the state. In some parts of the state this is seen as another upper Willamette region solution being forced on the rest of the state. A significant increase in communication among impacted parties should occur throughout the state. Future public forums should be widely advertised. Many who would have attended previously held meetings with creative and constructive input did not have the opportunity for public input into the process due to lack of awareness. The publicity concerning prior meetings was ineffective.

- **Public- private partnerships**

More interaction with private sector telecommunications companies is also recommended.

There could be substantial opportunity to craft a solution that would leverage existing private sector capabilities and new private sector infrastructure deployment into the overall solution.

It is the intention of the ORTCC to be an ally and resource in the process of delivering the highest quality of public safety communications interoperability for Oregonians. We recognize that this is not simply an exercise of throwing a switch on some new technologies and that there is also a need to become “interoperable” at the human level. We salute the investment of time and energy directed to this effort to date. We see a growing opportunity to work together with the public, potential partners and other governmental entities to ensure that we truly are meeting the public safety communication needs of all Oregonians while maintain our fiscal responsibilities to the taxpayers of the state.

Respectfully and sincerely submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Irwin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "John" being larger and more prominent than the last name "Irwin".

John Irwin  
Oregon Telecommunications Coordinating Council, Chairman  
541.664.2456  
[jirwin@mind.net](mailto:jirwin@mind.net)