

DATE: March 10, 2015

TO: City of Shoreline  
Attention: Debbie Tarry  
17500 Midvale Ave. North  
Shoreline, WA 98133-4905

FROM: Eastside Public Safety Communications Agency  
PO Box 97010, Mailstop PSEPS  
Redmond, WA 98073-9710

RE: Emergency Radio Communications in King County

Dear Ms. Debbie Tarry,

I am writing today to share with you recent developments related to emergency radio communications planning in King County. The current system, known as the 800 MHz King County Emergency Radio Communications System ("KCERCS"), has performed well since the mid 1990's but is nearing the end of its effective life. Simultaneously, vendor support for the infrastructure is waning and will completely lapse by the end of 2018 -this is not meant to alarm, as there is no day where the KCERCS will just stop working. We have been aware of the end of support for several years and have taken the steps we can to plan for this day. The issue is one of risk. As time advances, our ability to repair and maintain the system at its current level of performance will decrease and the risk of failure will increase. Capacity of the system can be strained today even in moderately large incidents due to user agency growth over the years. Lastly, there are large areas of the County that remain with poor or no radio signal.

To address these issues, the current owners of the KCERCS have been working together since August of 2012 to plan for and procure a replacement radio system. This replacement system is known as the Puget Sound Emergency Radio Network ("PSERN"). After a very long and complex competitive bid process, the current system owners selected Motorola to be the vendor for PSERN and a contract was signed in December of 2014 by King County to build the new system. The County has been asked to lead the implementation of the PSERN project. Implementation of the project will begin after project funding has been approved and is expected to take approximately 5 years to complete.

The project will: build, improve or replace towers and shelters at radio sites; install all the radio and peripheral infrastructure needed for system functionality; replace all dispatch console equipment; and, do a one-time 1:1 replacement of all end user radios for public agencies. PSERN will improve communications throughout King County and be interoperable with neighboring radio systems such as the Snohomish Emergency Radio System, Pierce County, City of Tacoma, The Boeing Company, Washington State Patrol and the Port of Seattle systems. It will have more capacity, provide more effective coverage to more of the County than the current system and have enhanced features such as over-the-air-programming and encrypted communication capabilities.

Governance and operations for PSERN were also a big area of discussion during planning over the last several years. Among the current owners of the radio system several models were considered for

PSERN once completed. Those discussions led to consensus that a new centralized non-profit corporation should be formed to own and operate all PSERN purchased equipment (except end user radios), and this agency would be governed by a board of directors made up of representatives of the current ownership. Also on this board would be ex officio representatives for the fire and police entities. The agreement to govern and operate in this manner has not been completed or finally approved by all of the current owners' legislative authorities yet, but a draft interlocal agreement and a Memorandum of Agreement have both been developed. They are being circulated for adoption with the current ownership agencies.

The non-profit owner/operator of the PSERN will provide a single point of service for all emergency radio system user agencies in the county once the new system is up and running. For now, service will continue to be provided as it currently is, through the existing four KCERCS owners. The new non-profit owner would have service level agreements which would provide for standardized services to radio customers and would develop efficiencies that were not possible under the federated ownership model of KCERCS. It would be responsible for all radio system infrastructure support, including dispatch consoles as well as for other centrally managed radio functions such as radio template management. Not only would the operator support and maintain the network, it would be required through interlocal agreement to provide upgrade and updates for all infrastructure equipment to ensure continued support for the network through its 20 year predicted lifecycle. Maintenance and programming support for end user subscriber radios is expected to continue at the "radio shop" level or via commercially available service providers as the owners choose.

The non-profit corporation's Board of Directors would be responsible for establishing rates for user agencies. The governance agreements mentioned above establish a rate structure for public safety radio users, non-public safety radio users, and dispatch consoles. Based on projections we have today, user agency radio rates are expected to decrease for most end users, but there are some agencies that will see an increase in rates. All dispatching agencies would begin paying for radio services in PSERN.

The project is estimated to be approximately \$246 million without financing costs. To pay for the project, the PSERN Steering Committee (KCERS owners) supported and the County Executive proposed to the Metropolitan King County Council, a 9 year property tax levy lid lift of \$0.07/\$1000 of assessed value to for them to consider placing on the ballot for voter consideration. On March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2015, the Council approved the measure for the April 28, 2015 ballot. To reduce and phase in the impact of rate increases for affected user agencies, a "rate stabilization" fund will be established with levy proceeds.

This is a highly complex technical project with the added dimensions of ownership and governance mixed in. No simple letter such as this can address all project facets with any depth. The PSERN project staff is prepared to visit with any agency that would prefer a more in depth brief. Much remains to be determined such as migration of users from the old to the new systems and radio programming requirements. The project will be working with user agencies and current owners to meet everyone's needs and ensure a successful implementation.

The projects website ([www.psern.org](http://www.psern.org)) has specific project information, recent news, and FAQ's for general information. It can also be followed on Twitter at @radiomatters

Scott Hatfield  
EPSCA Executive Director

For additional information, contact:

PSERN project staff:

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