



State Interoperability Executive Council Listening Session
SIEC session 5 – Radisson, La Crosse
June 27, 2005 - 1:00 PM to 3:45 PM

At 1:00 PM the listening sessions begins with opening remarks from Tom Lobe.

- Primary focus of listening sessions is to hear the needs and concerns of stakeholders and those most directly affected by interoperability
- Operational concerns are especially of great interest to the council
- While technical and financial issues are an important component of achieving interoperability, they are not the focus of the listening session

Members of the Executive Council present at the session include: Johnnie Smith, Melinda Allen

PowerPoint presentation by Tom Lobe (OJA)

- Federal Engineering conducted a statewide study resulting in recommendations from needs assessments
- The recommendations detailed three components of interoperability
 - o These included governance, technical, and funding aspects
- Governance
 - o The FE study recommends authorization of a State Interoperability Committee by either legislation or executive order from the Governor.
 - o FE interviews found that 93% of stakeholders indicated the need for an oversight board
 - o FE recommends that SIEC include representative stakeholders from both local and state government
 - o Executive order #87 and subsequent appointment of members to the SIEC by Governor Doyle
- Technical
 - o FE recommends Wisconsin adopt the methodology set forth by SAFECOM, a national program from the Department of Homeland Security
 - o FE also recommends adoption of the P25 suite of standards
- Funding
 - o A majority of stakeholders have indicated that funding is a significant issue in achieving interoperability
 - o Approximately \$14 million has been allocated for radio interoperability projects in Wisconsin
 - o Funding is directed towards voice system interoperability projects

- Funding and grant details are available in Homeland Security Bulletin 05-4 at <http://oja.state.wi.us>
- Executive order # 87
 - On February 2, 2005 Governor Jim Doyle signed executive order # 87 relating to Wisconsin radio communication interoperability
 - Wisconsin formally
 - Recognized the importance of public safety
 - Recognized the fact that public safety interoperability has not yet been achieved in Wisconsin
 - Recognized the significance of interoperable technology to enhance public safety and homeland security
 - Distinguished the need for interoperability between and within jurisdictions
 - Acknowledges that interoperable communications requires statewide coordination and leadership
 - Establishes the State Interoperable Executive Council (SIEC)
- The SIEC Council consists of members appointed by the Governor and include
 - OJA Executive Director, Adjutant General, Secretary of the Department of Natural Resources, Secretary of the Department of Transportation, State's Chief Information Officer, a Chief of Police, a Sheriff, a Fire Chief, a local Emergency Management official, a Tribal official
- SIEC committees
 - Outreach Committee
 - Technical Committee
 - Operations Committee
- Mission of SIEC
 - To set goals and objectives
 - To develop a review strategy
 - Set technical and operational standards
 - Develop short and long term recommendations for local government action
- Interoperability Standards (SAFECOM methodology)
 - APCO Project 25 standards adopted
 - Portable and radio hardware defined as P25 compliant, must be upgradeable for cost not to exceed the cost of purchase in a P25 compliant state
 - New or replacement radio equipment operating below 700 MHz must meet FCC narrowband requirements
 - Repeater system site hardware designed to allow for upgrade to increased capability with minimum amount of hardware replacement
 - Power and cooling must be sized to accommodate the installation of hardware above the initial site complement. Planning should include requirements that account for expansion capabilities up to 3 times the initial installation

- Tower loading calculations for antenna and feed line should include future installation of microwave backbone infrastructure
- Infrastructure upgrades that involve linking control points to repeaters or tower to towers, must include planning for expansion to carry both voice and data traffic

Listening session begins:

Question: Excluding funding, what are the immediate and most pressing needs of local, regional, and state jurisdictions with regard to interoperability?

(Keith Butler of La Crosse County):

- There seems to be limited information from the state and a lack of direction that filters down

(Melinda Allen - Council):

- Are these operational concerns? Technical?

(Keith Butler of La Crosse County):

- It is everything, including radios

(Jeff Kirkey of Trempealeau):

- We do not want a 'one size fits all' solution
- We have clear geographic limitations here
- If we have standards in place it may not work everywhere and suit everyone
- West/Central Wisconsin has a small population that covers a large area
 - Trunking systems would not work as well here
- There are different groups already in place
- We should look regionally and look at all entities that would be involved to find what works
- There should be a mix of guidance and direction and looking at what helps everyday local responders

(Johnnie Smith - Council):

- If you had to choose between statewide interoperability or your own independent (not fully interoperable system) what you choose?

(Keith Butler of La Crosse County):

- Well its much more valuable to everyone to focus on everyday response rather than the possibility of statewide response once in a while

(Johnnie Smith - Council):

- So you are operating with 13 entities right now. Are they interoperable?

(Keith Butler of La Crosse County):

- Yes, to a degree they are interoperable

(Melinda Allen - Council):

- Do you have a conventional or trunked system?

(Keith Butler of La Crosse County):

- Conventional

(Steve Golubic – Tribal representative):

- Finding a solution to interoperability concerns should not be a one size fits all approach

- It puts a strain on tribes, volunteers, etc
- We have no real interest in statewide interoperability
- Tribes see the money primarily going to urban areas and the “small guys” do not see anything
- Much of the equipment that was already bought is not in use
 - Any money spent should go toward equipment that will be used on a daily basis
 - Equipment sitting on a shelf in storage does us no good
- Many municipalities are unwilling to work with tribes
 - A resolution was passed recently by a county saying if a tribe wants to have a police system it must be set up on a separate network and 911 operation system
 - Tribal concerns were completely ignored
 - Tribal members are taxpayers

(Johnnie Smith - Council):

- We are just starting to evaluate interoperability and searching for solutions
- All comments will be considered
 - There are no pre-decided solutions

(Gale Sorum of OJA):

- Wisconsin has shown a history of home-rule tendencies
 - An element of home-rule will still exist even if statewide interoperability is the ultimate goal
 - Communities will be responsible for creating and maintaining their connections with others
- SIEC can set up guidelines but after all is said and done it is still up to everyone to work together

(Johnnie Smith - Council):

- Yes but ultimately there may have to be ‘teeth’ and incentives to work together

(Jeff Kirkey of Trempealeau County):

- We have already gone through many evaluations
- SIEC should review the studies to make decisions but OJA says to go spend money on communications
- How can the grant money be spent before SIEC starts making decisions?

(Johnny Smith - Council):

- That is a problem but SAFECOM and P25 can still be followed and yield results that will be compatible with what the end solutions will be

(Gale Sorum of OJA):

- Radio equipment will constitute a small part of the funds available
- Other ways to spend OJA money to help interoperability without purchasing hardware
 - There are many more dimensions to interoperability than just hardware
- We should decide on issues like reprogramming radios to stretch money without purchasing new equipment

(Melinda Allen - Council):

- The problem with the grant money coming before SIEC has began working on the interoperability issue is that there is a strict timeline on the spending of that money that we or OJA has no control over

(Jeff Kirkey of Trempealeau County):

- That is typical to find that if money is not spent it will go away
- We are frustrated at a local level when, as a rural community, we are given grants but only have 90 days to work with
 - o There are lengthy protocols and it cannot be done (time restraints)
 - o It must go through committees, County Boards, etc
 - o We can only do some things a few times a month
- This is not an effective way to spend money
 - o There are qualifications that unfairly limit us
 - o I must communicate and work with a multitude of agencies on their timeline
 - o We end up buying only 'ok' things to be safe but ultimately not a great solution

(Johnnie Smith - Council):

- If you have any more questions that are not answered, write us an email and we will get you an answer
- We do not all have a high level of technical expertise

(Steve Golubic – Tribal representative):

- On the list of committee members a 'tribal representative' listed. Why is there none serving

(Gale Sorum of OJA):

- There was a name and contact selected but they backed off

(Paul Wittkamp of State EMS communications):

- The division of public health has a conference in September
 - o There will be findings on communications presented there
 - o They would make a good resource for communications information with regards to EMS
- Make sure that hospitals, EMS and ambulances are kept in the loop with the interoperability issue

Question: What should we consider an acceptable level of interoperability?

(Steve Golubic – Tribal representative):

- There should be a concentration on locals
 - o Even at that level there is not 100% interoperability
 - o The state should not factor into the equation at this point because we are not even close to achieving it yet
 - o It does us no good to talk to others in the state if we can barely talk to our own neighbors

(Tom Lobe of OJA)

- So different agencies cannot communicate with each other in the same county?

(Steve Golubic – Tribal representative):

- Police can communicate with each other but otherwise no
- This is especially tough for tribal areas

(Johnnie Smith - Council):

- So it would be fair to say that an acceptable level of interoperability would be if it could be fully achieved at a local level?

(Steve Golubic – Tribal representative):

- Not just a county level, or even tribal, but multiple, surrounding counties
 - o Tribal lines do not follow county lines
 - o Many tribes cross borders so response to them is a multi jurisdictional battle
- If resources are local, communication should be too
- Lets not mess with 'band aid' fixes but actually get to the root of the problem

(Johnnie Smith - Council):

- So you want local interoperability but say that counties need to communicate so the goal would be to pursue regional interoperability?

(Steve Golubic – Tribal representative):

- It depends on what you mean by regional
 - o Tribes have police departments and cooperate with counties
 - o One tribe is in 5 different counties but jurisdiction is for counties so tribes have transcended those borders making interoperability a regional issue

(General comment):

- What happens if tribes need help and response?

(Steve Golubic – Tribal representative):

- The tribes are in trouble
 - o There are limited mutual aid agreements
 - o Tribes generally do not get good response
 - o Tribes often help outside boundaries but receive nothing in return
 - o Tribes force the interoperability issue to become regional
 - o Since tribal members are still citizens of the state they should receive services

(Richard Matushek of La Crosse County):

- Have you got the sense that people really want interoperability?
- It doesn't seem that people really want/need these communications
- If it does work, it must be implemented into every day first responders
- They have to want it for this to happen

(Johnny Smith - Council):

- I say there is a desire
 - o There are, of course, conditions to deal with
 - Many do not want to give up control (Home-rule)
 - There needs to be sight of a larger goal than simply achieving local interoperability

(Melinda Allen - Council):

- There are directives

- In Madison it was said that interoperability does not mean 100% communication with everyone all of the time but only when needed
 - o Interoperability is not something to pursue just because you can
- There is a clear desire to be interoperable not only with voice communications but also with data, etc.

(Jeff Kirkey of Trempealeau County):

- I understand what is said
- Locals cannot afford many pieces of this equipment
 - o Departments will refuse to buy the P25 stuff because the cost is unreasonable and not what would best suit our needs and requirements
- In Wisconsin we have different systems and capabilities
 - o It becomes a question of having 3 good, working everyday radios versus one amazing one that provides us with more than we need right now

(Gale Sorum of OJA):

- There are other underlying issues
- If the cheaper radios were to be purchased, in the not too distant future they will not be acceptable to use anymore
 - o It will not be possible to use them at all putting you back at square one without any radio in 5-7 years
 - o If cheap radios are bought it will be a waste
- We have a price list already and there are relatively affordable P25s on the market
- We must have radios built to a standard
- SIEC should continue forward with longterm planning
 - o Other radios are on the way out. P25 is the way to go

(Jeff Kirkey of Trempealeau County):

- I agree but locals will not be likely to accept this
 - o Their response would basically be that they will deal with the problem of needing the P25 when it arises
 - o It is a general assumption that if its required down the road and they have no funds, it will be funded for them

(Donn Martin):

- What about radio interoperability over state borders?

(Gale Sorum of OJA):

- SIEC was in 38 states before us
 - o Minnesota is doing metropolitan work and have now started to expand
 - They already have a plan but the issue is funding
 - o Other states have SIEC and are ahead of us
 - o We need to catch up but also see what not to do by looking over the mistakes that have been made
- The counties on the border of Wisconsin can work across borders
 - o In order to merge capabilities, agreements need to be made and special hardware will be needed so funding issues will arise

(Donn Martin):

- So we need to accept the guidelines of the counties on the other side of the border?

(Johnnie Smith - Council):

- National interoperability is the main goal but starting locally is the key
- There is a need to pool resources or understand how resources will be shared in case of an incident
- Interoperability needs to be examined at every level
- It is essential to fund the means to the end goal
- Work on bridging architecture
- Remember that input helps

(Steve Golubic – Tribal representative):

- As a county director, ten fire departments could not agree on trivial equipment and when the issue of radios arise it seems difficult to believe that any agreements and coordination will happen on other levels

(Johnnie Smith - Council):

- But the bottom line is that people need to start talking
 - o People are choosing not to communicate and it is becoming increasingly necessary
- Its important to remain optimistic

(Keith Butler of La Crosse County):

- In answer to the question, an acceptable level of interoperability seems to be at one county deep
 - o All first responders should be able to communicate to each other in and between disciplines irregardless of boundaries

(Gale Sorum of OJA):

- We want to build from a local level upward
- By using standards and planning we can achieve interoperability and then extend it to other areas

(General comment):

- Training seems to be a huge issue here
- Not everyone needs to talk to 150 different people at once
- We need to keep flexibility of everyone in mind as we proceed

Question: What non-technological issue remains the biggest hurdle to achieving radio interoperability?

(Keith Butler of La Crosse County):

- People, political, jurisdictional battles, turf wars are some of the issues we all face

(Melinda Allen - Council):

- There are 3 committees to the SIEC and the operational one will address many of those issues, including ten codes

(Johnnie Smith - Council):

- One thing that we are looking at in outreach is the question of what can the council do facilitate and promote communication?

(Keith Butler of La Crosse County):

- Show us guidelines. Where do we need to go?
- We see conflicting goals
- The SIEC and listening sessions seem like a good step at this point

(Melinda Allen - Council):

- What are people willing to give up for the sake of interoperability?

(Keith Butler of La Crosse County):

- We want you to show us what you want and to let us find a way to get there (ourselves)

(Steve Golubic – Tribal representative):

- The problem here is putting the cart before the horse
- We have some funding but no direction and this means to common starting point

(General comment):

- The training issue is big
- Firemen and first responders will listen if you tell them what to do. They may not like it, but they will do it.

(Johnnie Smith - Council):

- That is a solution that may work, but we are reluctant to do that
 - o We want to build a consensus, then a plan with input with a string attached (funding)
 - o We want to fund to encourage, not fund to mandate
 - o In the end when the money runs out, if people are still dragging their heels, this process is doomed already

(Melinda Allen - Council):

- Do you see a “dangling carrot”? Is the money what people want?

(Keith Butler of La Crosse County):

- Well, assistance with money means compliance with the state on these issues so ultimately, yes.

(Jeff Kirkey of Trempealeau County):

- The SIEC is new and we would like to be kept informed all the time
 - o Via website, mail, etc.
- Just knowing what to do after a plan has already been established is not good enough
 - o When we get questions, the answer “I don’t know” will not hold
 - o Keeping the website updated is vital
 - o No news is worse than bad news in this case so give us the tools to work with you

(Mike Horstman of La Crosse County):

- We have some optimism despite the challenges we face
- Our attention is focused
- I also agree with the idea of you showing us what you want and letting us get there ourselves
 - o All we are looking for is a ‘roadmap’ and we can make decisions for ourselves
- Someone will have to stand up and suggest statewide plan though

- We cannot constantly be quibbling over home rule issues because ultimately something will just have to be done
 - Money can effectively be used to gain compliance and support for the process
- (General comment):
- This sounds like a marketing effort
 - Keep active with administrations on a local level and draw them in to gain support
- (Gale Sorum of OJA):
- Homeland Security money is not a significant amount and the “carrot” will be getting smaller over time
 - Much of the motivation needed to continue interoperability after the money runs out will have to come from below
 - Regions can work together to learn the benefits of being interoperable
 - Someone must stand up and say what is needed from us
 - OJA needs to use ‘teeth’
 - In one of the Dakotas, radios were bought by the state than issued out and this is one of the options we have open to us
- (Melinda Allen - Council):
- Some of that is a training issue
 - The job of this council right now is to understand the needs expressed here
- (General comment):
- You can only expect so much motivation with money alone
 - Use values and motives to appeal to everyone
 - Motivation counts more than money because it makes sense
 - Our public is entitled to us getting our act together

Question: What training issues need to be addressed to achieve radio interoperability?

- (Jeff Kirkey of Trempealeau County):
- Dispatch centers need standardization
 - Ten codes differ from Law Enforcement to Fire Departments and even across borders
 - Incorrect ten codes are worse than being inconvenient, they are dangerous
 - There are protocol issues with individual agencies
 - Look to the hierarchy of departments (public works, etc) they do not use interoperability now but when a major event occurs we will need them and they must be trained as well
- (Greg Olsen of La Crosse FD):
- We have eliminated ten codes in La Crosse
 - Its necessary to get out in the field and hold sessions to help train
 - Make sure the training is understood and reinforced
 - Implement a hierarchy of control and communication to avoid power struggles during an event
 - Frequent and practical training is needed

- Functional, full scale exercises are also important

(Steve Golubic – Tribal representative):

- All of the money is focused on terrorism which means that much of the equipment that is bought is for those events, so it sits on shelves and collects dust
 - The equipment purchased needs to be used all of the time
- Interoperability seems to be an important issue for the federal government
- The best forms of training are those which use and implement the equipment on a daily basis

(Gale Sorum of OJA):

- SIEC should recommend training every so often and find out how radios are programmed
- In LA they had received fancy equipment but didn't know how to use it
 - Phoenix had a similar issue so the real problem is the training and not the hardware

(Johnnie Smith - Council):

- So dispatch centers should come first?
 - Do dispatch centers really have something to do with interoperability?
 - Should dispatch centers be necessary?

(Keith Butler of La Crosse County):

- I see that point but it is a matter of miseducation
- Dispatch centers are really the key
 - When response falls apart, it usually is because things have fallen apart at the dispatch center

(Johnnie Smith - Council):

- It isn't that dispatch centers aren't needed, but a question of how necessary they are for the process of becoming interoperable?

(Keith Butler of La Crosse County):

- In theory, interoperability should work without dispatch
- In reality, if the dispatch centers are taken out, things will fall apart

(Gale Sorum of OJA):

- SAFECOM model is good and we need to agree upon procedures and protocol
- It takes money to do this and this is where the Homeland Security funds can be applicable
 - The money can go towards training

Question: What role should vendors play in the future of interoperability?

(Jeff Kirkey of Trempealeau County):

- Define vendor
 - There is a difference between manufacturer and vendor

General response (Tom Lobe of OJA):

- My definition would include all of the above

General comment (Jeff Kirkey of Trempealeau County):

- I am looking at state contracts and the roles of vendors

- They need to come together
- As standards develop, serviceability becomes a major issue

(Steve Golubic – Tribal representative):

- Often times service and local representatives are not coordinated with the manufacturer

(Gale Sorum of OJA):

- Looking for the cheapest bid and buying those radios and piece-mealing means you have become the system operator
- Vendors need to help with not just buying but setting up the system
 - Its comparable to building a computer versus buying one from a manufacturer. It may cost less to build but when a problem arises there is no one to take the computer to. No one will touch it
- Piecing a system together makes for a shaky infrastructure

(General comment):

- Local service providers are a good resource
- Each discipline has a different view and vendors can help bring the systems together

(Gale Sorum of OJA):

- Vendors can help supply a design and find the parts but there needs to be independent system design helpers to figure out issues in an independent manner
- If problems arise who will we go to? We should not be trapped by one vendor or we become cornered on many fronts
- Standardization is good

(Jeff Kirkey of Trempealeau County):

- State can negotiate a contract price with providers and many should be included
- All authorized distributors should help be responsible to service the system and not under local agreements but through parent companies
 - Many of these issues are especially pressing for rural areas
- Contracts can be dangerous
 - You get what you pay for
- Vendors are a key element of the process because they have experts

(Greg Olsen of La Crosse FD):

- The cost of radios is a major concern
- Should/could the vendor go to councils, mayors, or someone about money to explain the issue to them?
- The costs are high and should be justified to the taxpayers

(Keith Butler of La Crosse County):

- Absolutely. The vendors should be ready to defend theirs sytem

(Gale Sorum of OJA):

- Radios are expensive but be careful not to equate cost issues that are not comparable
- It is a necessary expense
- The attitude toward them needs to shift

- If cheap radios are bought and an incident happens there could be severe legal issues
- People need to relate these issues back locally to gain support for this

Question: What is the role of municipal, county, and tribal governments in interoperability?

(Steve Golubic – Tribal representative):

- “If the incident doesn’t happen here it doesn’t matter or affect us”
 - o That has been the prevailing attitude from many who don’t want to bear the cost of interoperability
 - o An example was the 9/11 issue and how it is perceived on a very rural level
- Local councils won’t care about this because terrorist incidents ‘don’t happen in their back yard’. That is their perception
- These people need to be convinced. They need to know what the point is and the cost must be justified.

(Johnnie Smith - Council):

- Information about these meetings went out to those people
 - o We have a Mayor on the council and that should help relay those issues
 - o We want an outreach initiative to go spread this issue
 - o Its really up to us to change that mentality

(Jeff Kirkey of Trempealeau County):

- We can advocate change but its really not up to us
- I have submitted budget info and local councils need to know if the equipment will effect everyday operations
 - o If not, it drops on the priority list and funding is very tight as it is

(Johnnie Smith - Council):

- So you don’t touch lives every day?

(Jeff Kirkey of Trempealeau County):

- They don’t see it that way, no.

(Johnnie Smith - Council):

- Even if they don’t listen this needs to get done
 - o This is a national priority
- Hopefully education can help get the message across

(Jeff Kirkey of Trempealeau County):

- I agree but there are many aspects to look at
 - o Wisconsin Counties Association meets in September
 - Consider talking to them because it would give a lot of credibility to the cause
 - Help make locals an owner of the system they work to build
 - Maybe the Governor would be able to help by delivering a resolution

(General comment):

- Federal Engineering had goals to look at

- We can use SIEC support to help spread the message

(Keith Butler of La Crosse County):

- Municipal leaders want to know what they're getting for the money from Federal engineering
 - o If SIEC reviewed FE plans, it would help justify the impact on a local level but the findings seem divergent

(Melinda Allen - Council):

- There are operational issues that will be addressed which include gathering data, compiling information from surveys, etc.

(Keith Butler of La Crosse County):

- It seems like a lot of money was spent on Federal Engineering and people want to know what they got for their money
- FE should be willing to defend their product

General comment (Gale Sorum of OJA):

- I don't think the money was a waste
- The studies covered 2/3 of the population of Wisconsin
- The study was not only for OJA
- FE detected concerns for the counties

(Keith Butler of La Crosse County):

- We will have a hard time selling this to taxpayers

(Jeff Kirkey of Trempealeau County):

- We will wait to see how much money we receive and that may determine our level of participation

(Steve Golubic – Tribal representative):

- Decision makers are picky
- Careful sending information to government leaders
 - o Make sure it gets their attention
 - o Use the information to educate and let them know how it affects them
- When the money has run out the initiative has got to remain important enough to continue. Many will answer not agree.
 - o That would make this entire initiative a waste

(Johnnie Smith - Council):

- Expect federal funds to deteriorate
 - o We need to get a process in place
 - o Worry about sustainability at a local level
 - Locals must be willing to assist with this
 - Operational and maintenance issues will keep coming

(Gale Sorum of OJA):

- We need to encourage regional sharing
- For financial issues be willing to look outside the box
- Keep presenting issues and ideas to SIEC

Meeting Ends at 3:47 PM

Attendance at listening session:

Keith Butler, Jeff Kirkey, Richard Matusher, Carl Guse, Paul Wittkamp, Greg Olsen, Gale Sorum, Dave Kaun, Mike Horstman, Mark Smick, Mark Loether, Donn Martin, Steve Golubic