



An Altered Credit Allocation and a Combined Dispatch System Would Better Support State Law Enforcement Radio System

at a glance

The Statewide Law Enforcement Radio System provides state law enforcement agencies with a communications system that uses a single series of radio frequencies. The system improves inter-agency communication and is scheduled to be fully implemented by 2004.

To purchase radio equipment for the system, the state exchanged its radio tower assets for a \$25.5 million equipment credit from the system vendor. The Joint Task Force allocated radio credits to agencies to equip both sworn and non-sworn employees. As a result, agencies were able to purchase all but 185 radios needed for sworn law enforcement officers.

The Joint Dispatch System is a separate but related initiative consisting of regional dispatch centers that handle incoming calls for most agencies using the statewide system. However, the Fish and Wildlife Commission operates its own network of six dispatch centers at an annual cost of \$3.4 million. Consolidating the commission's dispatch services with joint dispatch would make more efficient use of state radio resources.

Purpose _____

Pursuant to s. 11.513 and s. 11.45, *Florida Statutes*, the Director of the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability initiated this project in response to a legislative request to examine funding issues related to the Statewide

Law Enforcement Radio System and Florida's efforts to implement a statewide joint dispatch system. This report addresses five questions.

1. How is the state financing radio equipment for the Statewide Law Enforcement Radio System?
2. How did the Joint Task Force allocate the \$25.5 million tower conveyance credit?
3. Did this method of allocation ensure that all sworn law enforcement officers received radios?
4. How much of the tower conveyance credits have agencies used?
5. What are the advantages and disadvantages of combining Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission dispatch services with state joint dispatch services?

Background _____

State law enforcement agencies are engaged in a cooperative effort to implement the 800 MHz Statewide Law Enforcement Radio System and the Joint Dispatch System. Both projects are being completed simultaneously to improve the routine and emergency communications of multiple state agencies.

Statewide Law Enforcement Radio System

The Statewide Law Enforcement Radio System (SLERS) is designed to provide state law enforcement agencies with a communications system that uses a single series of frequencies.

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The system aims to improve interagency communication and coordination for a wide variety of public safety activities, including natural disaster response and multi-jurisdictional law enforcement investigations. When completed, this digital, computerized system will serve over 6,500 users with over 14,000 radios in patrol cars, boats, motorcycles, and aircraft.

The Legislature initiated the SLERS project in 1988 with the creation of the Joint Task Force on Law Enforcement Communication.¹ The Joint Task Force comprises eight state law enforcement agencies that appoint representatives to its Joint Task Force board.² Four additional agencies have also been authorized to participate in SLERS under the statutory authority granted to the Joint Task Force.³

From 1988 to 2000, the Department of Management Services managed the project using Motorola as the radio equipment vendor. However, due to delays and cost overruns, the state decided to contract with a private company to take ownership of radio system infrastructure, complete its construction, and supervise future maintenance. In 1999, the Governor transferred management of the project to the State Technology Office, which subsequently negotiated a contract with MA-COM in September 2000.⁴

¹ Chapter 88-144, *Laws of Florida*.

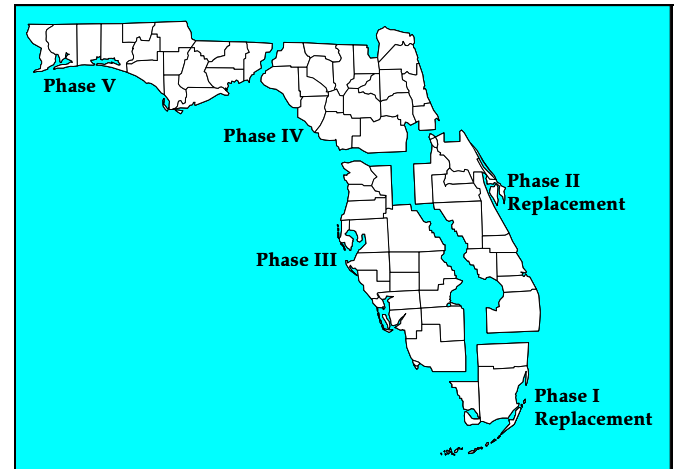
² The members of the Joint Task Force board are Department of Business and Professional Regulation/Alcoholic Beverages and Tobacco, Department of Corrections, Department of Environmental Protection, Department of Insurance/Division of State Fire Marshal, Department of Transportation/Motor Carrier Compliance Office, Florida Department of Law Enforcement (including Florida Capitol Police), Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles/Division of Florida Highway Patrol.

³ Section 282.1095, *F.S.* The additional agencies are Department of Insurance/Division of Insurance Fraud, Attorney General/Medicaid Fraud Control Unit, Department of Juvenile Justice and Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services/Division of Agricultural Law Enforcement. The Department of Lottery joined under the sharing plan, but has since decided not to participate in SLERS. The Department of Management Services was originally included in the sharing plan due to its administration of the Capitol Police. The legislature transferred responsibility for most of the functions of Capitol Police to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (Ch. 2002-21, *Laws of Florida*).

⁴ MA-COM, a subsidiary of Tyco International, was known as Com-Net Ericsson at the time of the contract.

As shown in Exhibit 1, the SLERS project consists of five phases. Phases I and II were completed between 1990 and 1998, covering much of southern and eastern Florida. Both of these phases were carried out under the previous contract with Motorola. Between Fiscal Years 1988-89 and 2000-01, the state spent over \$172 million on this effort.

Exhibit 1 Statewide Law Enforcement Radio System Phases



Source: State Technology Office.

Phases III, IV, and V are currently under development and are expected to be completed in 2003 under the MA-COM contract. Conversion of Phases I and II from Motorola to MA-COM will be completed by October 2004. Upon completion, the system's network will provide radio service that provides geographic coverage of 98% or more of the state.

The Statewide Law Enforcement Radio System is funded by a \$40 million advance payment to MA-COM and proceeds from annual motor vehicle and vessel registration surcharges of approximately \$13-17 million. The system will cost the state an estimated \$336 million, including maintenance and infrastructure, over the next 20 years.⁵

Joint Dispatch System

The Joint Dispatch System is a separate but related initiative that will be integrated into the SLERS system. The Joint Dispatch System will consist of

⁵ This includes Phases III, IV, and V, as well as conversion of Phases I and II to MA-COM technology.

regional dispatch centers designed to handle incoming calls for participating agencies and supervise the dispatch of officers using SLERS. The purpose of joint dispatch is to improve the consistency of dispatch services and promote efficient use of dispatch resources among law enforcement groups.

The Joint Dispatch System consists of seven regional centers: Miami, Lake Worth, Orlando, Fort Myers, Tampa, Jacksonville, and Tallahassee. The system is managed by the Joint Dispatch Oversight Committee composed of representatives of the Joint Task Force agencies participating in SLERS, except for the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.⁶ The Joint Dispatch System draws upon financial, personnel, and technical resources provided by State Technology Office and participating agencies. All centers will use MA-COM dispatch equipment when the SLERS system is complete.

Findings

How is the state financing radio equipment for the Statewide Law Enforcement Radio System?

Radio equipment is being financed through MA-COM "tower conveyance" and "like-for-like replacement" credits in addition to general revenue.

In order to reduce general revenue expenditures, the state negotiated a two-part vendor credit provision with MA-COM to fund radios and other communication equipment.

In the provision, the state transferred ownership of its radio tower assets to MA-COM. In exchange, MA-COM provided a \$25.5 million credit, referred to as the tower conveyance credit, to participating agencies; these credits are to be used to purchase radio equipment and services from MA-COM. The intent of the tower conveyance credit was to supply agencies with radios for Phases III, IV, and V.

The second provision requires MA-COM to replace Motorola radio equipment currently in use (bought for Phases I and II) with equivalent MA-COM radios. The MA-COM radio technology is proprietary, meaning the Motorola equipment

in Phases I and II will be inoperable when MA-COM completes the system. To make agencies whole for the loss of their equipment in Phases I and II, MA-COM agreed to replace the Motorola equipment on a "like-for-like" basis up to 6,000 radios. In other words, if an agency had 100 portable Motorola radios in Phases I and II, MA-COM would provide the agency with 100 MA-COM portable radios with comparable features and accessories. After further discussions in early 2002, MA-COM agreed to give agencies vendor credits equal to the value of their Phase I and II radios. This was intended to give agencies more flexibility to purchase goods and services from MA-COM. In July 2002, the Joint Task Force agreed to endorse the value of the state's 6,000 radios in Phases I and II as \$23 million, based on an analysis of the radio inventory.

In addition to vendor credits, agencies have allocated existing agency funds and secured additional SLERS funding through the appropriations process. The Legislature appropriated \$7.9 million to participating agencies for radio equipment for Fiscal Year 2002-03.

How did the Joint Task Force allocate the \$25.5 million tower conveyance credit?

The task force allocated the credit based on the total number of radios required for Phases III through V, as estimated by the agencies.

Although the State Technology Office is responsible for implementation of the project, the office deferred the responsibility for apportioning the tower conveyance credits to the Joint Task Force.

The task force set aside \$1 million of the \$25.5 million to cover miscellaneous expenses including software licensing and additional radios not covered in the like-for-like agreement of 6,000 radios. The task force then allocated the remaining \$24.5 million credit based on each agency's percentage of the total projected need for radios, as shown in Exhibit 2.

⁶ Though not a voting member of the Joint Dispatch Committee, the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission attends committee meetings and participates in committee projects.

Exhibit 2

Tower Conveyance Credits Allocated Based on the Percentage of Each Agency's Estimated Need

Agency	Phases III Through V Radios Needed	Percentage of Total Radios	Agency Distribution of Credits
Attorney General /Medicaid Fraud Unit	55	0.68%	\$ 166,564
Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services /Division of Agricultural Law Enforcement	311	3.84%	941,842
Department of Business and Professional Regulation /Alcoholic Beverages and Tobacco	198	2.45%	599,629
Department of Corrections	1,737	21.47%	5,260,383
Department of Environmental Protection	202	2.50%	611,743
Department of Juvenile Justice	20	0.25%	60,568
Florida Capital Police	130	1.61%	393,696
Department of Insurance /Division of Insurance Fraud	155	1.92%	469,407
Department of Insurance /Division of State Fire Marshall	79	0.98%	239,246
Department of Transportation /Motor Carrier Compliance Office	282	3.49%	854,017
Florida Department of Law Enforcement	620	7.66%	1,877,627
Florida Wildlife Conservation Commission	2,483	30.69%	7,519,592
Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles /Division of Florida Highway Patrol	1,815	22.44%	5,496,601
State Technology Office	3	0.04%	9,085
TOTAL	8,090	100.0%	\$24,500,000

Source: State Technology Office analysis, May 14, 2002.

This projected need included equipment for both sworn and non-sworn officers.⁷ For example, because the Department of Corrections accounted for 21% of the total radios requested, the department received 21% of the tower conveyance credits.

Did this method of allocation ensure that all sworn law enforcement officers received radios?

No. Agencies were short an estimated 823 radios for sworn officers. Even with the return of credits from the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and new tower conveyances, sworn officers will still need an estimated 185 radios at a cost of approximately \$800,000.

According to Florida law, the SLERS project was designed to serve law enforcement agencies. However, as the project has evolved, the Joint Task Force has permitted non-sworn law enforcement staff to use the radio system. Many non-sworn employees have legitimate law enforcement reasons to use the system. For

instance, State Fire Marshal investigative analysts must respond 24 hours a day to fires and explosions and have law enforcement duties, such as collecting evidence and interrogating suspects. Some non-sworn radio users, however, do not have a direct law enforcement role. For example, the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission assigns radios to biologists for communications from remote locations. The commission justified such assignments on the basis of employee safety.

Use of the radio system by non-sworn personnel was not an issue until the State Technology Office had to decide how to allocate the tower conveyance credits. In May 2001, the State Technology Office offered the Joint Task Force multiple options for dividing the tower conveyance credit. These included one option based on sworn officers radio needs only and another option based on radio needs for both sworn and non-sworn personnel. The task force voted for allocation based on both sworn and non-sworn personnel radio needs.

As a result, the tower conveyance credits will enable some agencies to meet their radio needs for both sworn and non-sworn personnel fully, while other agencies will need to seek additional state funding for radios for all of their sworn officers. Based on this initial allocation, sworn officers

⁷ Sworn officers include certified law enforcement and correctional officers, as described in Ch. 943, F.S. Non-sworn staff include other agency employees who need radio communication, but are not certified law enforcement, including arson investigators, crime scene technicians, and biologists.

were short approximately 823 radios. However, in August 2002, the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission reduced its estimate of the number of non-sworn personnel needing radios from 1,564 to 292 and returned \$1.9 million in tower conveyance credits to the pool to allocate for sworn law enforcement needs. In addition, the State Technology Office announced in September 2002 that it plans to convey three new radio towers to MA-COM for an additional \$900,000 in tower conveyance credits.

We estimate that these two actions will enable the state to provide an additional 622 radios for sworn law enforcement personnel. However, as shown in Exhibit 3, this will still leave a need for radios for approximately 185 sworn law enforcement users, at a cost of approximately \$800,000. Had the State Technology Office and the Joint Task Force prioritized its allocation of credits based on law enforcement needs, all sworn law

enforcement radio needs would have been addressed by the radio credits.

How much of the tower conveyance credits have agencies used?

As of December 2002, agencies have spent 85% of the tower conveyance credits.

With start-up of Phase III scheduled for February 2003, agencies began purchasing radio equipment in December 2001. MA-COM technicians have begun to program radios for individual agencies as radio orders have arrived. As of December 2002, agencies have used 85% of the allocated credits to purchase radios and equipment, as shown in Exhibit 4. According to the State Technology Office, the remaining radio credits will be spent during Fiscal Year 2002-03.

Exhibit 3

Even with Credits Returned by the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the Conveyance of New Tower Sites, the State Will Have Radio Needs for Approximately 185 Sworn Law Enforcement Personnel

	Sworn Law Enforcement Officers			Non-Sworn Personnel		
	Radios Needed	Radios Available	Unmet Needs	Radios Needed	Radios Available	Unmet Needs
Attorney General /Medicaid Fraud Unit (AG/MFU)	50	50	0	50	50	0
Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services /Division of Agricultural Law Enforcement (DACS/DALE)	337	337	0	0	0	0
Department of Business and Professional Regulation /Alcoholic Beverages and Tobacco (DBPR/ABT)	443	419	24	0	0	0
Department of Corrections (DCOR)	2,188	1,671	517	0	0	0
Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)	279	172	107	48	28	20
Florida Capital Police (FCP)	75	75	0	11	11	0
Department of Insurance /Division of Insurance Fraud (DOI/DIF)	265	265	0	15	15	0
Department of Insurance /Division of State Fire Marshall (DOI/DSFM)	244	244	0	9	7	2
Department of Transportation /Motor Carrier Compliance Office (DOT/MCCO)	540	540	0	52	52	0
Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE)	1,173	1,072	101	195	179	16
Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles /Florida Highway Patrol (DHSMV/FHP)	4,315	4,315	0	90	90	0
Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWCC)	2,479	2,405	74	1,564	658	906
Total Joint Task Force Agencies – July 2002	12,388	11,565	823	2,034	1,090	944
REVISIONS						
Revised Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWCC) – August 2002	2,479	2,421	58	292	220	72
Revised Total Joint Task Force Agencies - August 2002	12,388	11,581	807	762	652	110
Reallocation of Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission credits		422	(422)			
New tower conveyance credits		200	(200)			
Revised Total Joint Task Force Agencies - September 2002	12,388	12,203	185	762	652	110

Note: "Radios Needed" includes estimated radios needs for all phases, as of July 2002. "Radios Available" includes all radios purchased or available for purchase using tower conveyance credits, "like-for-like" replacement credits and legislative appropriations through Fiscal Year 2002-03. The Department of Juvenile Justice did not respond to survey.

Source: OPPAGA survey of SLERS agencies, July 2002.

**Exhibit 4
As of July 2002, Agencies Have Spent 85% of Their Tower Conveyance Credits**

Agency	Credits Allocated to Date	Credits Used to Date
Attorney General /Medicaid Fraud Unit	\$ 166,564	\$ 18,171
Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services /Division of Agricultural Law Enforcement	1,184,842	1,167,182
Department of Business and Professional Regulation /Alcoholic Beverages and Tobacco	599,629	599,629
Department of Corrections	5,260,383	5,260,383
Department of Environmental Protection	611,743	510,919
Department of Juvenile Justice	60,569	0
Florida Capital Police	393,696	26,469
Department of Insurance /Division of Insurance Fraud	469,407	405,483
Department of Insurance /Division of State Fire Marshall	554,575	554,575
Department of Transportation /Motor Carrier Compliance Office	854,017	854,017
Florida Department of Law Enforcement	1,882,627	1,447,872
Florida Wildlife Conservation Commission	5,599,133	4,937,179
Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles /Division of Florida Highway Patrol	5,850,409	4,198,090
State Technology Office	19,085	19,085
TOTAL	\$23,506,679	\$19,999,054

Source: State Technology Office analysis, December 6, 2002.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of combining FWCC and joint dispatch services?

Combining the state’s dispatch services would make more efficient use of communication resources, but would result in some short-term disruptions.

While the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission participates in the state’s SLERS project, the agency has chosen to maintain its own dispatch services independent of the state’s joint dispatch efforts. The commission currently operates six dispatch centers in locations separate from joint dispatch, at an annual cost of approximately \$3.4 million. During Fiscal Years 2001-02 and 2002-03, the commission will spend an additional \$815,000 to remodel two centers and consolidate two others, and install computer aided dispatch systems in all of its centers.

Combining dispatch operations would provide a statewide coordinated and unified dispatch system that would allow users to communicate quickly and easily in an emergency. It would produce cost savings and could improve officer safety.

Reduced Costs. A combined system would be less costly. Neither the State Technology Office

nor the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission were able to provide comprehensive estimates of statewide cost avoidance associated with dispatch consolidation. However, we noted several examples of cost avoidance. For example, the commission would not have to purchase a logging recorder (\$9,000), an emergency power unit (\$22,000), and furniture (\$17,000) for its Panama City location if it joins joint dispatch in Tallahassee. Moreover, phone line charges to operate radio control circuits will be eliminated when the MA-COM microwave backbone becomes operational in mid-2003. For the Tallahassee joint dispatch center this amounts to an estimated cost reduction of \$244,000 a year. The commission also could benefit from cost savings by routing transmissions through the microwave backbone.

Enhanced officer safety. Consolidating dispatch services should also enhance safety. Currently, Fish and Wildlife Commission officers needing assistance can contact other commission employees directly only through its dispatch centers. Under consolidated dispatch, commission officers would be able to contact law enforcement personnel directly from any of the joint dispatch agencies. This would enhance the

timeliness of law enforcement response to an officer in need of assistance.

Reduced maintenance and dispatch traffic. A combined system would be easier to maintain. With fewer dispatch sites, the overall design of the system would be simpler and subject to fewer points of failure. It would be easier to maintain 7 joint dispatch centers than 13 centers (7 joint dispatch and 6 commission dispatch centers).

The Fish and Wildlife Commission cites concerns about consolidation. While the commission continues to maintain its own system, it has changed its position on merging with joint dispatch. For example, the commission agreed to a pilot project, which would combine its Panama City center with the Tallahassee joint dispatch center, and will consider future consolidation on a statewide basis. However, the commission has expressed concern about a number of drawbacks associated with consolidation. We believe these needs could be accommodated under a statewide joint dispatch system.

First, commission personnel assert that only commission dispatchers are familiar with the rural locations frequented by its officers. While Florida Highway Patrol and other law enforcement officers are able to give dispatchers their locations based on street addresses or highway mile markers, commission personnel often operate in rural areas, such as swamps and rivers, where their exact location may not be readily known. The commission argues that these conditions require a greater degree of dispatcher familiarity with officers, their routines, and their general locations. Commission dispatchers also answer conservation, hunting, and fishing questions from the public and record citizen complaints into an agency database. The commission contends that other dispatchers' lack of familiarity with its officers and rural locations would pose a threat to officer safety.

Commission personnel also note that its current dispatch centers are not located in the same cities as those of joint dispatch; as a result, commission dispatchers would need to relocate to retain their jobs. The commission staff speculates that many dispatchers would not be willing to move. For example, the commission estimates that of the 13 dispatchers in Panama City, fewer than half may decide to transfer. The joint dispatch system

could therefore lose some experienced dispatchers. However, it is unclear whether this turnover would in fact occur, and its effects could be ameliorated through cross training. Commission personnel note that the state would incur some costs to move dispatchers from Panama City to Tallahassee, which it estimates at \$187,590 during the first year, with \$34,200 recurring thereafter. These estimates include moving and commuting costs and would vary greatly depending on the number of staff affected.

Another option that has been discussed would be to co-locate the joint dispatch Tallahassee office and the commission's Panama City office as a first step toward consolidation. Co-locating would reduce costs by sharing office space and some technology, such as logging equipment and emergency power units. However, co-location would not improve the efficiency of radio resources or better distribute dispatcher workload since there will still be two separate computer aided dispatch systems. It also would not address personnel needs.

Recommendations ---

To address the remaining radio needs of law enforcement officers, we recommend that the Joint Task Force reallocate the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's \$1.9 million tower conveyance credit and give priority to allocating the new tower conveyance credit to agencies with unmet radio needs for sworn officers. The Joint Task Force should give priority to officers who face the greatest potential safety threats.

We also recommend that the Legislature direct the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to join the joint dispatch system. As a first step, the commission should combine its Panama City dispatch center with the Tallahassee joint dispatch center. As noted by the State Technology Office, the Tallahassee center would make a good choice because the north Florida region is not yet operational, it is close to the central office employees who could facilitate the transition and cross-training, and the center is fully prepared to house commission dispatchers.

As previously mentioned, the commission has agreed to co-locate its staff with joint dispatchers in the Tallahassee center, as pilot project. We recommend expanding the scope of the pilot to

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full consolidation in order to fully identify the benefits, drawbacks and cost implications of consolidation.

As the next step, we recommend that the State Technology Office, the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and the Joint Dispatch Oversight Committee develop a consolidation plan for the remaining commission and joint dispatch centers detailing proposed timelines for consolidation, estimated costs by center, and agency cost sharing agreements.

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