

2022 Report to Law and Justice Interim Committee on Statewide Public Safety Communications

The Statewide Public Safety Communications System consists of 66 radio tower sites, and 14 dispatch centers across Montana. This system provides critical Public Safety Radio Communications to city, county, state, Tribal, and federal agencies across Montana. This radio system supports EMS, fire, law enforcement, military, and public works agencies across Montana.

The 2017 Legislature passed HB 604 which gave administrative authority of the Statewide Public Safety Communications System to the Department of Justice. https://leg.mt.gov/bills/2017/hb0699/HB0604_x.pdf This bill did not provide a funding mechanism to fund all the necessary upgrades needed to the Statewide Public Safety Communications System. (Map #1 represents the current Statewide Public Safety Communications System, and its coverage.)

The 2019 Legislature passed SB 352 which funded the Statewide Public Safety Communications with \$3.75M per year. <https://leg.mt.gov/bills/2019/billhtml/SB0352.htm>

The funding from SB 352 became available on July 1, 2019. The Department of Justice hired a Program Manager for the Statewide Public Safety Communications System in November of 2019, and then two technicians to maintain equipment in March of 2020, and another technician in June 2022.

In September 2019, The Department of Justice contracted with Motorola to replace all the radio equipment statewide that was no longer supported, and to upgrade that equipment as needed for the next 10 years. The initial upgrade replaced radio equipment and software at all the Statewide System's dispatch centers and radio tower site locations across the state. In 2022, the State received another update of software and equipment at all the dispatch centers and radio tower site locations across Montana.

All radio sites are connected via a microwave network. Much of the microwave network was also out of support and in need of upgrades. In June of 2020, the Department of Justice signed a \$4.8M contract with Aviat to upgrade all the microwave network equipment. Installation of this microwave network equipment started in the summer of 2021 and continues this summer. The hope is to have the Microwave network upgrade completed by the end of this year, or the spring of 2023.

The radio and microwave site equipment run on batteries and rectifiers in case of a power outage. Batteries, rectifiers, and antennas are routinely checked and replaced when needed. Maintenance on this ancillary equipment continues as we implement the radio and microwave upgrades across the state.

The recent upgrades to the Statewide Public Safety Communications System allowed for other users and agencies to use the system. In 2017, the system had just over 10,000 users. Today, over 12,000 users are on the statewide system. This increase was due to the additional users from tribal, city, county, state, and federal agencies. City and county governments are leveraging their own resources with statewide infrastructure to enhance their local coverage, which benefits all users statewide.

- Lewis and Clark County added a radio at a tower located at the Stark Armory at the Helena.
- Pondera County used county funds to purchase dispatch consoles compatible with the statewide system. The Pondera County Sheriff's Office is now able to use the statewide system infrastructure, increasing their local radio coverage to statewide capability, while saving county tax dollars as they don't have to maintain the tower infrastructure. The Conrad Police Department is also adding radios to operate on the statewide system and will have no infrastructure costs associated with that increased capability.
- Yellowstone County also purchased dispatch console equipment that connected the Yellowstone County Sheriff's office to the statewide system. This has increased coverage and greater interoperability for the deputies of Yellowstone County.
- The City of Billings has also purchased dispatch consoles, radios, and tower infrastructure to connect to the statewide system. The City of Billings project will increase coverage and interoperability for responders in the Billings area. The City of Billings used city ARPA funds for this project. This partnership saved the city money by taking advantage of the statewide infrastructure already in place, and also benefits all statewide users with increased coverage and capacity for users in the Billings area. The total investment for the City of Billings was over \$10 million.
- Roosevelt County is in the process of using county ARPA funding to replace radios, add tower locations and connect their dispatch center to the statewide system. This county project will leverage statewide infrastructure to enhance coverage and capacity in Roosevelt County for all statewide users.
- Montana Army Air National Guard has purchased radios that are on the statewide system and installed them in their helicopters based in Helena. They operate Chinook and Blackhawk helicopters for search and rescue and firefighting missions. Operating on the statewide system gives them statewide, over the horizon, and air to ground communications to assist them in their missions.

Since the 2019 Legislature funded Statewide Public Safety Communications, the system has been brought up to date, continues to be upgraded, and there is a plan for maintenance and sustainment of Statewide Public Safety Communications until the funding sunsets in 2029. The statewide system does not however cover every part of the state.

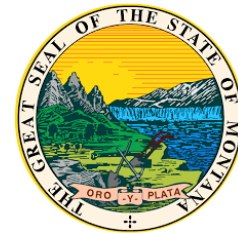
In 2021, DOJ introduced a \$53 million dollar plan to expand statewide public safety communications to the areas of Montana that are not covered currently. This plan, illustrated Map #2, shows the expanded coverage that would occur by increasing the number of tower sites statewide. DOJ introduced this plan to the Montana ARPA Communications Commission formed under HB 632. DOJ was found ineligible for funding through the Communications Commission due to the coordinating language found in SB 297, which prohibits governmental agencies from using ARPA Communications Commission funds. DOJ has looked at other commissions for funding this expansion, but the project has been deemed ineligible.

DOJ continues to seek funding for expansion of the Statewide Public Safety Communications System to serve all Montana.

In conclusion, much work has been done to maintain the system since the 2019 funding was appropriated for the Statewide Public Safety Communications System. In the three years, employees have been hired, agreements have been made across Montana, equipment has been replaced to bring the Statewide Public Safety Communications System up to date, and to maintain the system until 2029. The upgrades to the Statewide Public Safety Communications System are a benefit to all Montanans and anyone traveling through, especially our first responders who rely on the system daily to ensure the safety of Montanans. DOJ looks forward to working with the Law and Justice Interim Committee to explore all funding opportunities.

Questions concerning this report can be addressed to:

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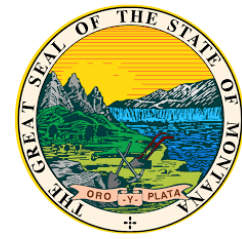


2022 Law and Justice Interim Committee Report on:

State of Montana

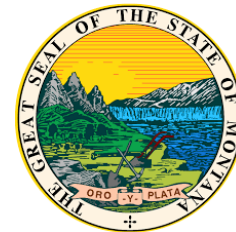
Public Safety Communications system





Communications System overview

- **Five main elements:**
 1. **Radio Tower sites to provide coverage for Public Safety radio users**
 - 2017 59 Statewide radio sites
 - 2021: 66 Trunking Sites
 - “Trunking” and “Conventional” operation
 - 2017: 8000+ radio users
 - 2022: 12,000 + radio users
 - 940 Talkgroups 2021
 2. **Consoles for Dispatchers**



Communications System overview

- 13 Dispatch Console sites across state
 - Flathead, Great Falls 911, Helena 911, MHP Dispatch, Gallatin, Broadwater, Central Montana (Judith Basin, Fergus, Petroleum), Hill, Blaine, Pondera, Yellowstone County, **Silver Bow, Richland.**
 - 2021 Added Pondera County, Yellowstone County
 - 2022 City of Billings is contracted to add their dispatch center
 - 64 Console operator positions
- 3. Radio Network “Core” that handles call processing and system management between radios sites and dispatch consoles
- 4. Radios for Public Safety users: over 12,000 currently on the system
- 5. Microwave network connecting sites and the Core

