



Minnesota Public Safety Communications Funding Study

911, ARMER, NG911, FirstNet

The Statewide Emergency Communications Board (SECB), formerly known as the Statewide Radio Board (SRB), provides oversight of the public safety communication systems that provide immediate access and response for emergency assistance. These systems include: the existing statewide 911 system, the modernization of the existing 911 system to a high speed (IP) enabled network referred to as Next Generation 911 (NG911), the statewide radio system known as ARMER, and FirstNet, the nationwide wireless broadband for public safety.

These critical communication tools require funding for continued implementation, maintenance and upgrades. A study, requested during the 2013 legislative session, assessed these systems and the sustainability of current funding mechanisms. The report was finalized February 2014 and provides important information as we look to the future.

Highlights of the report include:

Public Safety Agencies Satisfied with ARMER and NG911

- 911, elements of NG911 currently implemented and ARMER are the comprehensive public safety communication systems relied upon by the public safety community throughout Minnesota.
- Public safety agencies and users want legislators and local elected officials to know they are very satisfied with the ARMER and NG911 systems. These state-of-the-art systems have been, and will be, successful in:
 - Delivering 911 calls and supporting information to the appropriate public safety answering point (PSAP) from a broad spectrum of modern communication devices.
 - Providing reliable communication for large-scale events, such as the bridge collapse in Minneapolis.
 - Handling day-to-day events, such as a car chase that crosses multiple boundaries.
 - Providing communications for critical incidents such as hostage or shooting situations where multiple agencies assist each other and must communicate seamlessly.

ARMER and NG911 Maintenance Funding

- Minnesota has traditionally funded the backbone structure for the legacy 911 system, NG911 and ARMER communication systems through the 911 fee collected from telephone service subscribers. As these systems continue to evolve, the challenge has been to coordinate the maintenance and upgrades of local (municipal, county and state agency) elements of the system purchased by these entities.
- Strong communication between the state, SECB, regional emergency communication boards, local government agencies, and state agencies that use the system are required when making decisions that affect the whole system.
- When a decision is reached by the governance structure, there should be full support of the decision. These decisions will take time and long range planning that must begin now.



FirstNet and Funding

- FirstNet, the nationwide wireless broadband network for public safety users, is in the early planning stages at the national level. Little is known about the potential costs and obligations to the state or local jurisdictions.
- While this broadband network may eventually include a voice communications component, that feature is not anticipated in the foreseeable future, and the ARMER system will, and should remain our primary link for voice communications for public safety well into the future

Future of 911 Funding Fee

- The 911 fee is currently a strong and reliable funding stream. However, changes in the public's use of traditional telephone lines, how wireless services are marketed, and the saturation of devices in the market, indicate there could be challenges to this funding stream in the near future.
- Should the fund encounter revenue challenges as a result of the risks identified in the report, state statute requires debt service for the 911 revenue bonds used to build the ARMER backbone take precedence over all other 911 special revenue account obligations. This includes those for which the fund was originally established: the operational costs of the legacy 911 system, annual funding to PSAPs, the 911 call centers and the existing costs to maintaining the ARMER backbone under the responsibility of the state.
- The existing commitments leave little room for new expenses and could potentially require an increase in the 911 fee to complete the existing maintenance of the ARMER backbone and the completion of the continued implementation of the NG911 system.

Costs to Local Government and State Agencies

- There are significant costs to the users of the system that have not been traditionally funded through the 911 fee.
- Local governments that connect to the state backbone systems (911 and ARMER) use local funding to build and maintain their local equipment and any local enhancements. The exception is the annual appropriation of 911 funds to PSAPs to cover specified PSAP expenses.
- State agencies, such as the Departments of Corrections, Human Services and Natural Resources, which are connected to the ARMER backbone, must maintain their own enhancements and make radio purchases from their operating budgets (General Fund).

Effective public safety communication is very important in responding effectively to requests for emergency assistance. The SECB must continue to ensure these critical systems are reliable and constantly meeting the needs of the responders and the public. This partnership of users is achieved when all levels of government work together to manage these critical communications. Only through this collaboration between the legislature, the SECB, state agencies, and local governance can funding of these systems be coordinated to ensure seamless operation, reliability and effectiveness for those needing, and those delivering, lifesaving emergency services.