

Iowa Department of Public Safety
Status Report on Appropriations for Radio Communications Purposes
Submitted January 13, 2012

House File 648 of 2011 appropriated to the Iowa Department of Public Safety a total of \$7.5 million over a period of three fiscal years beginning with Fiscal Year 2011-2012 for “provision of a statewide public safety radio network and the purchase of compatible radio communications equipment.” Further, HF 648 directed the Iowa Department of Public Safety to provide a report to the Legislative Services Agency and Department of Management by January 13, 2012.¹

This report is intended to fulfill the reporting directive of HF 648. This report is organized in the following sections.

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¹ See 2011 Acts, HF 648, Division II, Section 8 for appropriation and study directive.

I. Introduction and Overview

A. Background – Interop Board and Master Plan

In 2004, former Governor Thomas Vilsack commissioned an Iowa Communications Task Force to examine the state of public safety communications in Iowa and to make recommendations to improve interoperability in Iowa.

That Task Force examined the issue and reported their findings that many state agencies and local governments across the State of Iowa own or operate disparate radio systems that are aging rapidly and in need of modernization. The lack of ability to fully intercommunicate with other agencies (multi-jurisdictional or cross-discipline), especially in emergency situations, is a matter of great concern to public safety officials.

Many of the Task Force's recommendations were formalized into legislation (HF 353 of 2007) that established the Iowa Statewide Interoperable Communications System Board (ISICSB). The provisions of HF 353 are codified at Iowa Code Sections 80.28 and 80.29.

The ISICSB falls under the joint purview of the Department of Public Safety and Department of Transportation, however, this is for administrative purposes only. The ISICSB is not under the direction or control of the Iowa Department of Public Safety or any other state agency. It is an independent entity with a mission to develop, implement, and oversee policy, operations, and fiscal components of communications interoperability efforts at the state and local level, and coordinate with similar efforts at the federal level, with the ultimate objective of developing and overseeing the operation of a statewide integrated public safety communications interoperability system.

The existence of the ISICSB also serves to conform with the Department of Homeland Security's requirement that each state establish a governing body or authority over communications interoperability.

The ISICSB devoted several years of effort to the development of a Master Plan for Iowa. It should be specifically noted, the plan is not a plan for a communications system for state agencies, but instead is a plan that is intended to provide a road map for the potential development of a statewide, fully interoperable communications system that includes both voice and broadband data communications elements for all public safety users. The initial estimate for the cost of creating the system described in the Master Plan was \$336 million. The communication system described in the Master Plan might best be described as a vision for the "communications infrastructure" for all public safety agencies in Iowa – it is not the solution for each public safety agency to achieve narrowband compliance, which is a separate but related matter.

The purpose of this report is not to report activities of the ISICSB, but instead to report on the use of the \$7.5 million appropriation by Iowa DPS to comply with the narrowband mandate and simultaneously advance the larger goal of communications interoperability.

B. Summary of Narrowband Mandate

The Federal Communication Commission (FCC) has mandated that by December 31, 2012, "all VHF and UHF Public Safety and Industrial/Business land mobile radio (LMR) systems in the 150-174 MHz and 421-512 MHz bands" must migrate from 25 KHz channel bandwidth to 12.5 KHz or narrower technology.

According to the FCC, this Federal narrowbanding mandate will ensure more efficient use of spectrum, relieve congestion, and result in increased channel availability for Land Mobile Radio systems.

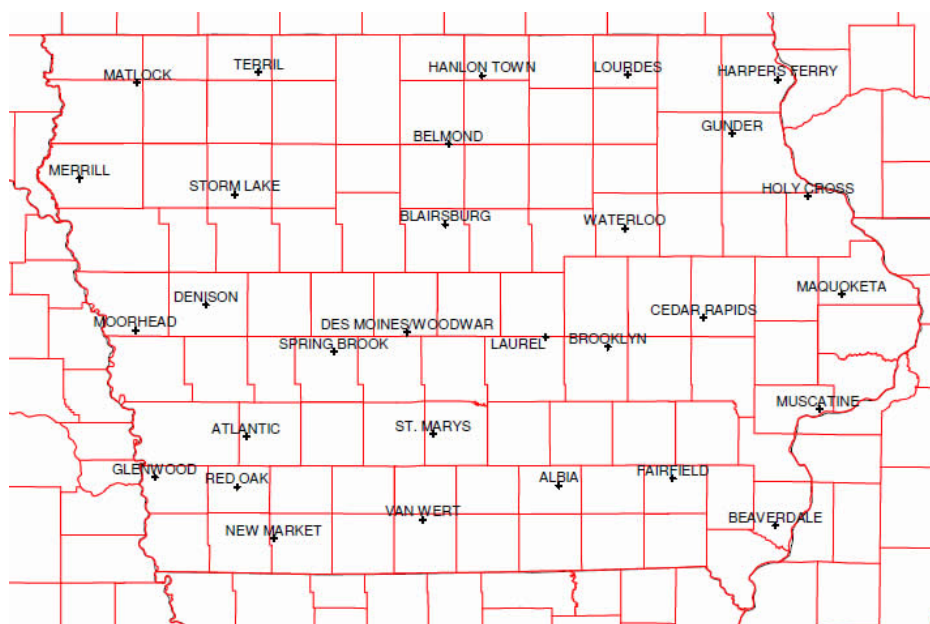
The simplest explanation of the narrowbanding mandate is that users of certain portions of the VHF and UHF communications spectrum will be required to transmit on radio channels that are half as wide as had been common – the spectrum is being parceled into narrower pieces.

Converting to the narrower bandwidth brings with it numerous technical, financial, and even operational challenges. Perhaps the two most noteworthy narrowbanding challenges for many agencies, to include Iowa DPS, is the loss of communications coverage that comes with narrowband conversion and the need for new radio equipment to replace older equipment that cannot be converted to narrowband communications.

C. Current DPS Tower Sites

To set the stage for the reporting of the current and planned use of the funds appropriated to the Iowa Department of Public Safety, it is helpful to provide a brief depiction of the existing state communications system infrastructure, particularly given that the conversion to narrowband communications results in the loss of communications coverage.

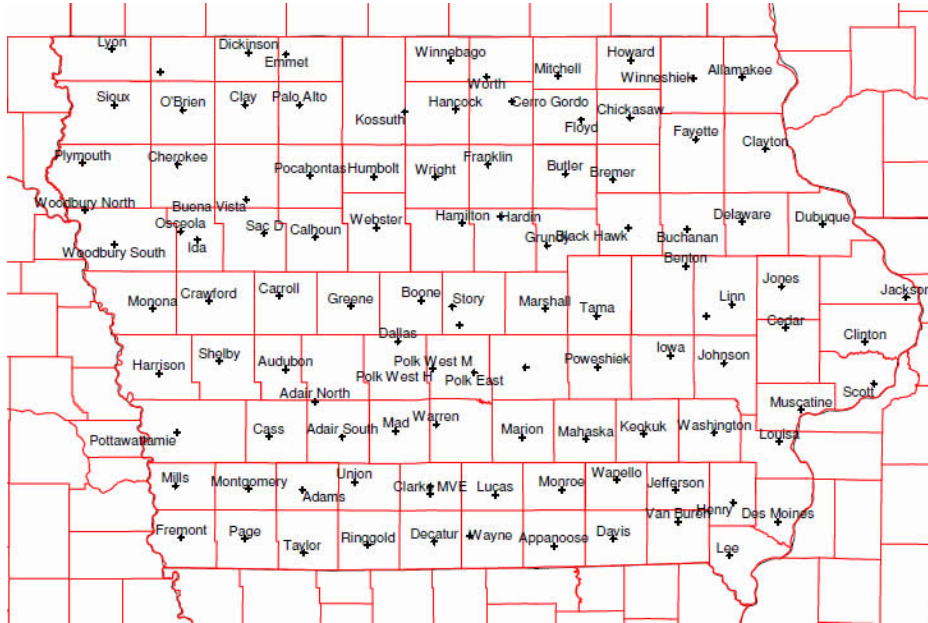
Current DPS tower sites are shown in the figure below.



D. Current DOT Tower Sites

In addition to the towers utilized for the state agency public safety communication system, the Iowa Department of Transportation also has a large number of towers that are utilized for non-law enforcement operations of the Department of Transportation. These towers are generally much smaller than the towers utilized for the state public safety communications system.

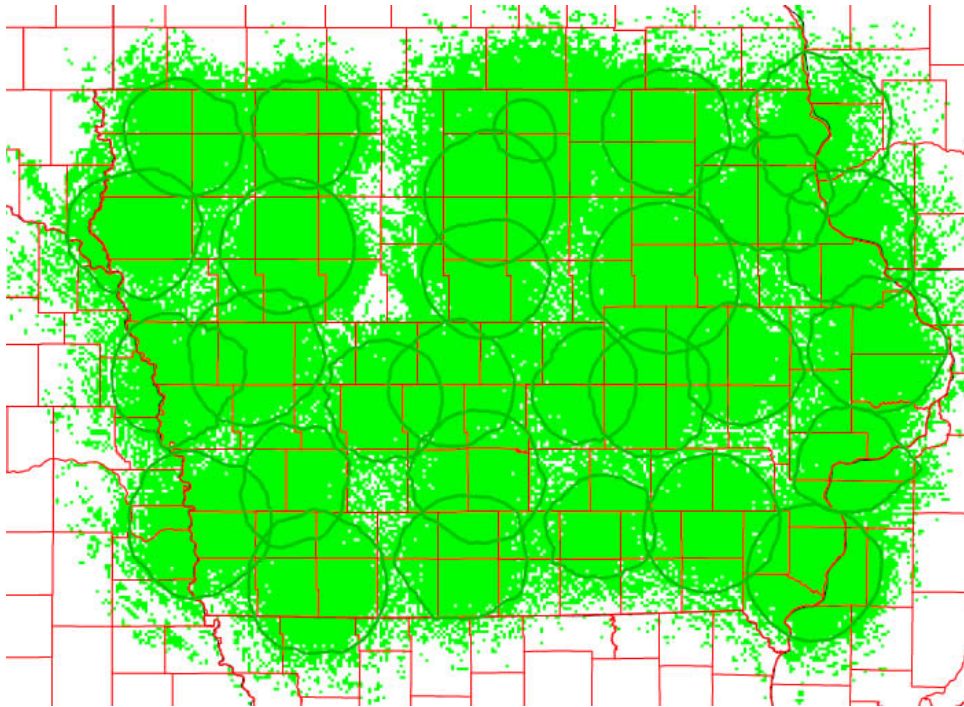
Current DOT tower sites are shown in the figure below.



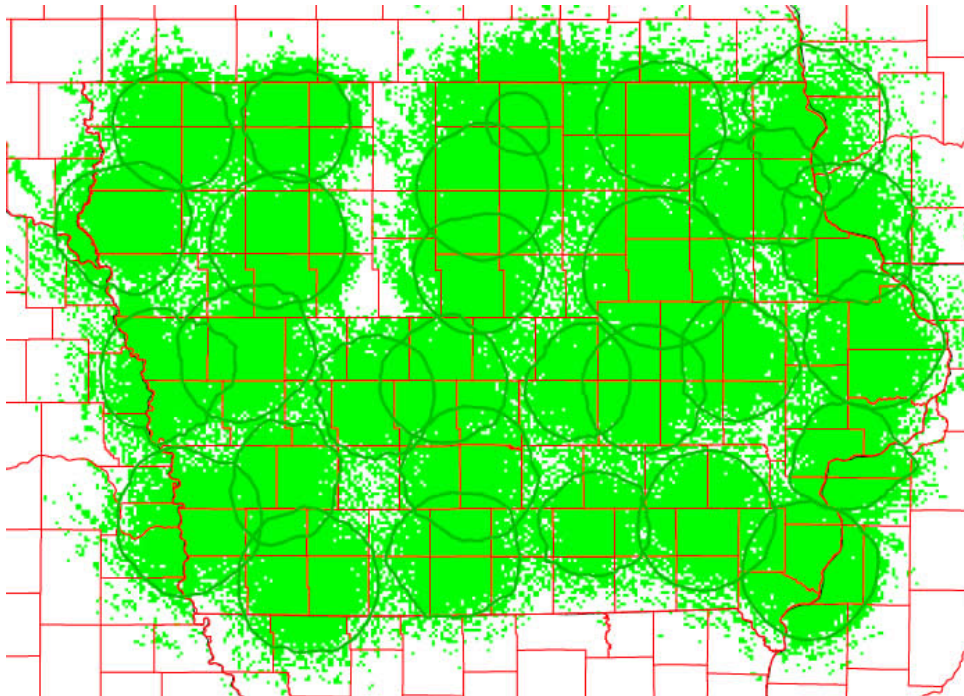
In addition to the above depicted DPS and DOT tower sites, there are hundreds of public and private communication towers throughout the state of Iowa. Opportunities for tower sharing and a range of public-private partnerships are addressed in Section III.E. of this report.

E. Pre and Post Narrowbanding Communications Coverage

The following figure depicts communications coverage for DPS towers prior to narrowbanding.



The following figure depicts communications coverage for DPS towers after narrowbanding.



F. Status of Narrowband Conversion for State Communications System

- All mobile radios in DPS have been reprogrammed to comply with the federal narrowband mandate. This reprogramming was for DPS Base Channel only. Mobile radios are units that are installed in vehicles. Handheld radios are not considered to be mobile radios, but instead are typically referred to as “portable radios.”
- All DPS tower repeaters have been narrowbanded at the tower sites. This is for DPS Base Channel only.
- DPS will begin narrowbanding LEA (Law Enforcement Assistance) Channel and all remaining DPS Channels (Iowa, Mutual Aid) on April 2nd, 2012.*

**NOTES:*

- The LEA channel is a common channel for law enforcement use when one officer or agency needs assistance from other law enforcement agencies. Examples of the types of situations when the LEA channel is used are pursuits, barricaded subjects or hostage situations, or any other circumstance when an officer is in need of assistance. The LEA channel was created when the state’s current high band (VHF) public safety communication systems was developed in the 1970s. Most states in the nation do not have a statewide LEA channel, so in many regards, Iowa was pursuing a basic and somewhat limited form of communications interoperability many decades before communications interoperability became a nationwide priority. Given that the LEA channel will be narrowbanded to comply with the federal mandate (see schedule below), the access to and availability of LEA will be further reduced.
- The Iowa channel is used for law enforcement communications with non-law enforcement agencies and entities. If, for example, a state Trooper encountered a dangerous road condition, such as an oil spill, ice, or major road surface defect, the Trooper (or deputy, or police officer, etc...) could communicate with local DOT maintenance personnel to coordinate a response to the scene.
- The Mutual Aid channel is used for joint communications among multiple public safety agencies in a specific location or area when joint operations or responses are occurring, but when there is not a need for broader communications to all law enforcement agencies over a larger geographic area. Unlike the LEA channel, the Mutual Aid channel is not a repeated channel, which means that transmissions will be confined to a smaller geographic area instead of transmissions being repeated among multiple towers covering a larger area.

The narrowbanding of LEA, Iowa, Mutual Aid, and Point-to-Point (PTP) conversion schedule is as follows:

- **APRIL 2ND – APRIL 6TH --- DES MOINES STATE RADIO LEA FREQUENCIES INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING: DES MOINES LEA, LAUREL LEA, ST MARYS LEA, AND VAN WERT LEA.**

- **APRIL 16TH – 20TH** --- ATLANTIC STATE RADIO LEA FREQUENCIES INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING: SPRINGBROOK LEA, ATLANTIC LEA, GLENWOOD LEA, NEW MARKET LEA, DENNISON LEA, AND MOORHEAD LEA.
- **APRIL 30TH – MAY 4TH** --- STORM LAKE STATE RADIO LEA FREQUENCIES INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING: STORM LAKE LEA, MERRILL LEA, MATLOCK LEA, AND TERRIL LEA.
- **MAY 14TH – 18TH** --- CEDAR FALLS STATE RADIO LEA FREQUENCIES INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING: BLAIRSBURG LEA, BELMOND LEA, CEDAR FALLS LEA, HOLY CROSS LEA, GUNDER LEA, HARPERS FERRY LEA, AND LOURDES LEA.
- **MAY 29TH – JUNE 1ST** --- CEDAR RAPIDS STATE RADIO LEA FREQUENCIES INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING: BROOKLYN LEA, CEDAR RAPIDS LEA, MAQUOKETA LEA, AND MUSCATINE LEA.
- **JUNE 11TH – 15TH** --- FAIRFIELD STATE RADIO LEA FREQUENCIES INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING: ALBIA LEA, FAIRFIELD LEA, AND BEAVERDALE LEA.

G. Challenges – High Band Skip/Interference

The current VHF high band radio system used by state law enforcement agencies is built upon a technological model that was favored in the 1970s. It features a relatively small number of very large high output towers to cover a given area. This model stands in contrast to Land Mobile Radio (LMR) systems that are being developed in the 700/800 MHz range. These systems typically feature a larger number of smaller, lower output towers, and higher communication capacity usable by multiple agencies.

In the course of transitioning to narrowband communications, the state radio system has remained in the VHF high band frequency range. Remaining in the VHF high band has kept transition costs much lower than would be the case to move to the 700/800 MHz spectrum, however, it also presents certain problems. Most notable among those is significant problems with interference from other users, signal skip, and loss of coverage.

Signal skip is a phenomena that can result in VHF signals traveling far beyond the distance they normally travel, which is typically “line of sight.” A number of natural events, such as stalled weather systems, sun flares, and meteor showers can cause VHF signals to travel hundreds of miles. When this occurs, users in one area can suddenly begin receiving transmissions from users that are great distances away, which interferes with communications and operations generally, not only by directly disrupting the communications of users in a particular area, but also by causing confusion about who is transmitting and what sort of assistance or action is needed.

Both Nebraska and Missouri, which have been operating primarily in the VHF high band, are remaining in the VHF high band (unlike many other jurisdictions that are transitioning to the 700/800 MHz spectrum), but are building out a “trunked” system and adding additional towers to regain coverage lost during narrowband conversion. Unfortunately, this has exacerbated problems with signal interference and signal skip.

The problems are particularly severe along the southern and western Iowa borders, with similar issues occurring near the Iowa border with Wisconsin, though the problems can and do occur throughout the state. At times, the problems have become so severe that major communications disruptions have occurred, presenting a potential for life threatening situations.

II. Status of Appropriated Funds

A. FY 2012 Appropriation

The initial appropriation of \$2.5 million was expended for the acquisition of 100 mobile radios for Iowa State Patrol enforcement vehicles and for repeaters for DPS towers (a repeater is an electronic device that receives a signal and retransmits it at a higher level and/or higher power, or onto the other side of an obstruction to extend the range of the signal).

The initial acquisition of 100 mobile radios was a necessary step toward narrowband compliance, interoperability, and even basic operability, as these radios were needed to outfit the regular complement of new vehicles being brought into service during the fiscal year. It should be noted, the old mobile radio vehicular repeaters, which employed crystal technology and were 13 years old, were not only narrowband incompatible, but had also aged to the point that malfunctions and maintenance problems were becoming commonplace. The acquisition of the 100 new mobile radios to replace 100 of the old mobile radios represents the immediate need, however, an additional 275 radios will need to be acquired for the Iowa State Patrol enforcement vehicle fleet. This does not include radios for other peace officers in the Department (see discussion under Section III of this report, which addresses estimated needs).

The radios are vehicular repeater capable, meet P-25 standards, and comply with the federal narrowband mandate. The vehicular repeater system provides a vital link between a Trooper who is out of their vehicle, other Troopers, and the Communications Center. When a Trooper is in their vehicle they can make use of the high power (100 watt) car mounted mobile radio, which offers considerable power to transmit to the nearest tower (though currently there is not 100 percent coverage in Iowa).

When a Trooper is outside their vehicle, their portable radio (typically worn on the equipment belt with the microphone secured near the lapel) offers very limited range due to the low power output (5 watts) of a typical portable radio. The vehicular repeater system is the bridge between the portable radio and the vehicle mounted mobile radio. A Trooper who is out of their vehicle can utilize this portable radio to communicate with the repeater system in the vehicle, which in turn routes communications through the vehicle mounted mobile radio, thereby providing the

Trooper with the same high output transmission power regardless of whether they are in or out of their vehicle.

The 100 mobile units are VHF and 700/800 MHz capable. Though Iowa does not have a comprehensive, statewide interoperable public safety network for all public safety users, these radios are fully interoperable.

The 100 radios arrived at the end of November 2011, and are currently being installed in Iowa State Trooper enforcement vehicles.

The new repeaters for 28 tower locations across the State of Iowa have been acquired and are scheduled to be replaced starting January 2012. This acquisition was required to maintain the current communication infrastructure and achieve narrowband compliance for transmissions made from tower sites.

A summary of these purchases is as follows:

- \$1,066,959.00 for 100 APX 7500 Dual Band Mobile Radios and associated accessories and software, plus 100 UHF 450-470 MHz simplex cross-Band Vehicular Repeaters.
- \$1,603,789.30 for base station repeater project, which includes:
 - o 31 VHF Quantar HPB repeaters for Base DPS Frequency
 - o 31 VHF Quantar HPB repeaters LEA Channel
 - o 4 Astro Tac satellite receivers
 - o 4 Digitac voting comparators with Console Priority for Base DPS Frequency
- \$2,670,748.30 – TOTAL

The \$2.5 million appropriation is being supplemented by \$155,000 in federal resources and \$15,000 available for the replacement of a base unit damaged by lightning. Detailed technical specifications for equipment purchases can be provided upon request.

B. FY 2013 & FY 2014 Appropriations

It is anticipated that the FY 2013 appropriation will be utilized to complete the acquisition of the remaining 275 mobile radios that are needed. It is also anticipated that the \$2.5 million appropriation for FY 2014 will be utilized to initiate deployment of interoperable communications infrastructure. At present, it is not clear what system, combination of systems, or partnerships will be pursued to advance the development of interoperable communications infrastructure.

The Iowa Department of Public Safety has released a Request for Information (RFI) soliciting responses from potential vendors or partners for the purpose of gathering system design information, considerations and compatible subscriber equipment information from qualified vendors for a statewide public safety land mobile radio communications system infrastructure in the 700/800 MHz band utilizing P25 technology utilizing current infrastructure owned by the State of Iowa and other infrastructure that is publicly/privately owned. Six responses have been submitted to Iowa DPS.

III. Estimated Needs – Narrowbanding and Interoperability

A. DPS radio equipment

The Iowa Department of Public Safety anticipates purchasing more mobile radios (275) for ISP enforcement vehicles cars to complete outfitting of the fleet. This will finalize narrowbanding for the State Patrol.

The 275 radios that will be acquired for the State Patrol does not include communications equipment for the other divisions within DPS, however, the mobile radios currently installed in vehicles used by the other enforcement divisions are narrowband capable. Therefore, it will not be necessary to replace these radios to comply with the federal narrowband mandate. Instead, these radios will need to be replaced when they reach the end of their useful life.

There are approximately 202 mobile radios in vehicles used by the other enforcement divisions. At current pricing, it is estimated that each mobile radio would cost approximately \$6,120. This is lower than the cost of the mobile radios used by the Iowa State Patrol, as the other divisions do not use the vehicular repeater system.

B. DOC radio equipment

The Board of Corrections has approved the purchase of 1,710 handheld radios and 68 mobile radios. The handheld radios will operate on an 800 MHz platform inside the prison system and will be fully interoperable with DPS and DNR.

The 68 mobile radios will be VHF and 700/800 MHz capable to be interoperable with DPS, DNR, and other agencies. These radios are essentially the same mobile radio the State Patrol has already purchased, but without a vehicular repeater system. They will be utilized in their transport vehicles.

The Department of Corrections estimates the cost to acquire these radios at \$3.6 million dollars.

C. DNR radio equipment

The Department of Natural Resources is currently pursuing the acquisition of 100 mobile and 100 handheld radios for the Enforcement Bureau. Radios currently utilized by the Parks Bureau are already narrowband capable and are currently being converted.

The estimated cost for this acquisition is \$1.3 to \$1.4 million, with funding to be derived from Fish and Game Protection Fund.

The Department of Natural Resources released a Request for Proposals (RFP) on November 2, 2011, which was subsequently withdrawn. A new RFP was released on December 19, 2011, with a response deadline of January 6, 2012.

D. Tower costs

With the purchases of narrowband capable radio equipment described above, the state agency communications system will be narrowband compliant, and state agencies will be fully interoperable with each other. Further, state law enforcement personnel will be able to communicate with any local law enforcement agency. However, there will not be a statewide interoperable communications system available for use by all public safety entities.

One solution to create a statewide interoperable voice communications system available to all public safety agencies would be the development of statewide communications infrastructure in the 700/800 MHz spectrum, which would require approximately 100 additional tower sites. This solution, if pursued, would solve coverage, capacity, and interference issues with current VHF systems.

The costs for each tower site would vary, however, a rough estimate of the average tower site cost is \$260,000 (which includes the tower, building, concrete, VHF antennas and heliax, grounding, power, installation, transfer panel, and generator). The estimate is inclusive of the following items:

Building 12 x 14 Concrete pad Installed	\$30,000
300 ft tower with VHF antennas and heliax	\$190,000
Fence, grounding	\$10,000
AC power phone	\$5,000
Generator - 25 kw	\$17,500
Transfer panel 200 amp	\$4,000
Freight, setup, misc	\$3,500
TOTAL	\$260,000

With the need for approximately 100 additional tower sites at an estimated cost of \$260,000 each, the total tower site need is roughly \$26 million. Additionally, a system in the 700/800 MHz spectrum would need to be a “trunked” system. “Trunked” radio systems differ from “conventional” radio systems in that a conventional radio system uses a dedicated channel (frequency) for each individual group of users, while “trunking” radio systems use a pool of channels which are available for a great many different groups of users, thus providing far greater efficiency in use of communications resources.

A trunking system for all existing DPS tower site and the additional 100 sites is estimated to cost approximately \$90 million. The \$90 million cost, plus the \$26 million cost for additional tower sites would result in a total cost of \$116 million.

However, it is critical to note that the \$116 million estimate for a statewide 700/800 MHz interoperable voice communications infrastructure should not be considered to be the projected cost to the state, as this figure assumes that all towers would be owned by the state. The figure does not account for any of numerous options for partnerships between the state, local governments, and a wide range of private sector entities.

E. Tower sharing opportunities

Given the significant cost to build a state interoperable voice communications infrastructure, the Department of Public Safety has requested information from potential vendors and partners, as there is a wide array of potential partnerships that can be pursued. The most obvious potential for partnership falls in the realm of tower sharing. Across Iowa, there are many hundreds of state, county, and city government communications towers, as well as hundreds of privately owned towers and structures that could be used as towers. To reduce the cost of migrating to an infrastructure built for the 700/800 MHz spectrum, partnerships must be pursued.

Beyond towers, there is additional communications infrastructure that is owned and operated by public agencies, private entities, and cooperative public-private partnerships. It is the view of the Department of Public Safety that exploration of potential partnerships should include not just towers and tower sites, but also other types of communications infrastructure. Beyond equipment and infrastructure, there may be opportunities for ongoing resource sharing and collaboration relating to maintenance and ongoing use of the system.

Until such time that the Department of Public Safety completes its review of responses to a Request for Information (see RFI discussion below) and pursues other potential partnerships, it is not possible to have comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the wide array of potential partnerships, or all of the ways in which the various private and public partners could be brought together in mutually beneficial arrangements.

In addition to the DPS effort to evaluate the responses to the DPS-issued RFI, efforts are being undertaken by the ISICSB to solicit as much information from stakeholders and experts, such as the operators of local government public safety communications systems, to learn about the strengths and weaknesses of their existing communications systems and explore opportunities for partnerships. On January 19, 2012, the ISICSB is hosting a meeting of the operators/users of the eight largest public safety communications systems in Iowa. Given that DPS does hold one seat on the ISICSB, it is expected that this ISICSB event will be beneficial not only to the Board's efforts, but it also may be beneficial to the DPS effort to pursue interoperability.

As these potential partnerships are being identified and assessed, it may become the case legislative changes are necessary to remove barriers to cooperation or expressly authorize certain types of partnerships or arrangements. Apart from the recognition that some barriers to partnership may exist, the Iowa Department of Public Safety has not yet clearly identified specific legal barriers that may hinder or prevent partnerships. When such barriers are identified and solutions developed, Iowa DPS will bring suggestions and requests to the Iowa General Assembly.

IV. Status of Requests Relating to a Public Private Partnership

A. Non-DPS Activity – Interop Board RFI

In July 2011, the ISICSB issued an RFI (Request for Information) to identify and explore appropriate collaborations and partnerships, both public and private. The ISICSB Technical Committee anticipates completing their analysis of the RFI responses in early 2012.

There has been some confusion regarding the release of RFIs, as the Iowa Department of Public Safety also released an RFI. The RFI released by the ISICSB differs from the RFI released by the Iowa Department of Public Safety in that the Board's RFI sought information regarding the development of a fully interoperable statewide voice and broadband data communications infrastructure, whereas the RFI released by DPS sought information on statewide voice communications system without a broadband component.

B. DPS RFI for statewide wireless communications system infrastructure

On October 21, 2011, the Department of Public Safety issued a Request for Information relating to the provision of mission critical voice services for public safety agencies, based upon interoperable communications across the various disciplines of public safety, levels of government, and neighboring states using 700/800 MHz spectrum. State, local, and other public and emergency response personnel need highly reliable and easily accessible communications systems to provide immediate and coordinated response and assistance in times of emergency, minimizing the loss of life and property.

In the RFI, the Department expressed interest in pursuing a statewide public safety wireless communication system infrastructure to support the 700/800 MHz spectrum (though DPS continues to operate in the VHF high band as described above). The RFI specified that potential vendors or partners should describe how they might pursue development of a system infrastructure that would provide mission critical voice interoperability among its primary users and other public safety agencies to support day-to-day, mutual aid, and task force operations. The RFI also specified that any proposed system must be highly reliable, fault tolerant, spectrally efficient, easily scalable, and meet the operational expectations of user agencies to achieve full interoperability utilizing the 700/800 MHz land mobile radio (LMR) spectrum.

The RFI closed on November 18, 2011. A total of six RFI responses were submitted from five companies. RFI responses are as follows:

- Harris – Approximately 150 pages
- Motorola – Approximately 380 pages
- RACOM – Approximately 70 pages
- Raytheon – Approximately 20 pages
- Relm Wireless – Approximately 179 pages
- Relm Wireless – Approximately 200 pages

C. Bid for Independent External RFI Review Services

The Department determined that it would be highly valuable and beneficial to have the assistance of a service provider with expertise and knowledge in the realm of public safety communications systems that is external to and independent of the department. Therefore, DPS solicited bids for a vendor to provide independent expert review services to assist DPS in evaluating RFI responses.

As of the date of this report, DPS is finalizing a contract with a communications system consulting firm, G.J. Therkelsen and Associates, Inc., of Eden Prairie, Minnesota. Once the contract for expert review services is executed, it is anticipated that the work of the review of RFI responses will be complete and delivered to the Iowa Department of Public Safety in approximately 60 days. At that time, a full review will be performed to select an appropriate course of action.

V. Conclusion

The Department of Public Safety, working in conjunction with the Department of Corrections and Department of Natural Resources, have made significant progress toward compliance with the federal narrowband mandate.

DPS has taken steps to advance the goal of having a fully interoperable statewide voice communication system. Given the significant cost to build such a system, DPS has requested information from potential vendors and partners, as there is a wide array of potential partnerships with both public and private entities.

DPS received six responses to the Department's RFI that was released in October, 2011. DPS is currently in the process of executing a contract with an independent expert to review those responses. The six responses, plus the expert review of the responses, will form the basis for a Request for Proposals (RFP) that will likely be issued in mid to late 2012.

Until the full range and nature of solutions is understood, and decisions are made, DPS will refrain from taking any action, and will advise other agencies to refrain from taking action, that would preclude any potential alternatives for an interoperable communication system.