STATEWIDE AGENCIES RADIO SYSTEM

Annual Status Report

A Report to the Governor, House Appropriations Committee, And Senate Finance Committee

October 2024

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Superintendent

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

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October 1, 2024

TO: The Honorable Glenn Youngkin,
Governor of Virginia

The Honorable L. Louise Lucas
Chair of the Senate Finance Committee

The Honorable Luke E. Torian
Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Mark D. Sickles
Vice-Chair of the House Appropriations Committee

Pursuant to House Bill 6001 (2024 Special Session I) Item 415.C.2 of the 2024 Virginia Acts of Assembly, I am respectfully submitting herewith the annual status report on the Statewide Agencies Radio System (STARS) Program.

Respectfully,

Gary T. Settle

Superintendent

TAB/WJD

Enclosure

Executive Summary

Statewide Agencies Radio System 2024 Status Report

Colonel W. Steven Flaherty, State Police Superintendent, and Mr. Mark Moon, Vice President and General Manager of Motorola, signed a $329 million contract between Motorola and the Commonwealth of Virginia for the design, construction, and implementation of the Statewide Agencies Radio System (STARS) on July 13, 2004. A ceremonial contract signing was held on July 16, 2004, in conjunction with a press conference.

Effective July 1, 2011, The Virginia State Police Communications Division assumed the engineering, installation, maintenance, and operations of the STARS system. The STARS Network, including the backbone microwave network, the land mobile radio network, the five (5) Tidewater tunnels, two (2) western tunnels, and all vehicle-based hardware and software for all twenty-one State Agencies, were operational.

STARS now provides a multi-channel, trunked digital voice and data wireless communications capability that meets APCO Project 25 Phase 2's public safety requirements. The core microwave network consists of Multiprotocol Label Switching (MPLS) ring-protected transmission paths providing the highest quality of service, security, and reliability possible through controlled system access and Advanced Encryption Standard (AES) encryption for law enforcement users when needed. This network supports the 23 participating agencies throughout the Commonwealth and facilitates interoperability with other state, local, and federal agencies.

Initial Bond Funding

Pursuant to the Code of Virginia §2.2-2264, the General Assembly authorized the Virginia Public Building Authority to issue revenue bonds not to exceed $159,300,000 for the construction, improvement, furnishing, maintenance, acquisition, and renovation of buildings, facilities, and land for the STARS project. Chapter 245, approved by the Virginia General Assembly session on March 30, 2006, authorized additional funding via bonds issued by the Virginia Public Building Authority in the amount not to exceed $201,900,000, to complete the STARS Network.

The revised Contract appropriation cost for STARS is	**$361,200,000.**
Less $50,000 allocated to the Department of Forestry,	**$361,150,000.**
Phase 1 Cost	**$346,186,399.**
Bond Funds remaining after Phase I	**$14,963,601.**
New site construction Phase 2	**$3,218,788.**

New site construction Phase 3	**$1,619,871.**
New site construction Phase 4	**$4,046,542.**
Hampton Tower Site, GTR8000 Site Repeater Upgrade, -48VDC Power Upgrade, MDTs, and Telscan Upgrade	**$6,000,000.**
New site construction Phase 6	**$78,400.**
Projected Funding Balance at Project Completion	**$ - 0 -**

STARS Program Management Structure

The STARS participants are composed of the following 23 agencies. Representatives from each agency make up the User Agencies Requirements Committee (UARC):

Chesapeake Bay Bridge and Tunnel Police
Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control
Division of Capitol Police
Department of Conservation and Recreation
Department of Corrections
Department of Emergency Management
Department of Environmental Quality
Department of Fire Programs
Department of Forestry
Department of Wildlife Resources
Department of Health
Department of Juvenile Justice
Department Military Affairs
Department of Mines, Minerals, and Energy
Department of Motor Vehicles
Department of State Police
Department of Transportation
Virginia Information Technologies Agency
Virginia Marine Resources Commission
Virginia Port Authority
Buchanan County Sheriff's Office, Fire & EMS Departments, and Grundy Police Dept.
Cumberland County Sheriff’s Office, Fire & EMS Departments

The STARS Management Group is a Board established by Executive Order 28 (2002) and composed of the Secretaries of Agriculture and Forestry, Commerce and Trade, Finance, Health and Human Resources, Natural Resources, Public Safety, and Transportation. The Secretary of Public Safety serves as the Chairman. The STARS Management Group provides direction and governance for STARS' development, implementation, and ongoing operation. In addition, they review all procurements and

contracts, coordinate radio frequency licenses granted by the federal government to agencies of the Commonwealth, and promote interagency cooperation and coordination in the use of communications resources.

User Agencies Requirements Committee (UARC) consists of two representatives (primary and alternate) from each member agency and institution. The STARS Management Group selects the Chairman of the UARC. The UARC shall have two co-chairs. The VSP Communications Officer shall serve as co-chair, and the UARC membership shall recommend the second co-chair. The UARC meets as necessary, but at least quarterly. The specific duties of UARC are to advise on the needs of member agencies for the planning, design, establishment, and operation of STARS, provide advice on proposals for other federal, state, or local agencies to join STARS, and on any proposals for third party use of any STARS infrastructure or component, and assist the STARS Management Team with the development of a comprehensive management plan and procedures for the operation of STARS.

STARS Annual Operating Costs

The STARS Network is a public safety grade wireless communications system that must be maintained in an operational status 24 hours per day, seven days per week. To accomplish this, a well-trained staff of engineers and technicians must be available with access to repair parts, test equipment, and vehicles on a 24/7 basis. On July 1, 2011, the Department assumed the responsibility for equipping new vehicles, aircraft, and boats that belong to the 23 STARS agencies, removing equipment from decommissioned or crashed vehicles, and the refurbishment and re-installation of the reconditioned hardware into another vehicle. Per Chapter 2, 2024 Virginia Acts of Assembly, Item 415, the FY2025 and FY2026 allotted funding for Telecommunications and Statewide Agencies Radio System (STARS) (30204) is $40,622,738.

Current Enhancement Projects

Maintaining technology today is a labor-intensive and costly proposition. Hardware and software can become obsolete not long following purchase and installation, and STARS is no exception. The FY 2024 lifecycle cost to keep the core Motorola portion of the network current is $1,709,431. This does not include the hardware and software upgrades, repair parts, and labor necessary to keep the transport network at top operational efficiency.

Current enhancement projects include:

- Completed the upgrade of all seven division dispatch phone systems and two for continuity of operations and training.

Motorola Solutions' Vesta 9-1-1 Call Handling platform is now in service. It allows dispatchers to go to any other dispatch location and take the assigned numbers from that division without forwarding numbers one at a time. This system will have two core servers: one in Richmond and one in Salem for redundancy. This solution will be managed and

expanded to include other UARC agencies on the STARS network to help keep maintenance and operation costs down with a single platform. The Division of Capitol Police is currently live on the system, and four other UARC agencies are converting to the system.

Interoperability Between STARS and Outside Agencies

Local, state, and federal radio systems operate in several specific frequency bands (VHF low-band, VHF high-band, UHF, 700 and 800 MHz). Radios operating in different frequency bands cannot communicate directly. The Commonwealth Link to Interoperable Communications (COMLINC) allows dispatchers at the state, federal, county, and city communications centers to establish communications patches between themselves and other agencies regardless of the frequency band. For example, a Sheriff's Office can patch the Fire Department regardless of the frequencies used by each agency. Patches can also be made to phone networks to establish dispatcher conferences. Using COMLINC, each dispatcher initiates the patch at their console in coordination with the participating agency. COMLINC also provides instant recall of recorded audio.

COMLINC was initially implemented in 16 localities, including VSP Division 1 and State Police Divisions 1 and 5, along with the STARS Network Operations Center (NOC). Through grants, the network has grown to over 140 fixed sites and 20 mobile command posts or tactical units, providing interoperability between all State Police Divisions, most localities, colleges and universities, and other state and federal agencies.

As the network has grown, the Virginia State Police Communications Division accepted responsibility for engineering, installation, maintenance, and technical support for the entire statewide COMLINC network. The upgrade project for COMLINC has all sites live, and all the VSP dispatch center sites have been completed. All upgraded systems use the latest Windows operating systems and have received new hardware to replace aging equipment. Each new upgrade is calibrated to ensure optimized audio performance with the radio equipment connected to it. Weekly roll calls between the state and localities are underway to provide better performance through repeated system use and user familiarity. The southwest regions of the state are heavy users of the system, with nearly daily usage being observed. The COMLINC system has other state agencies that are excellent partners. The Department of Transportation (VDOT) and Department of Health (VDH) are large contributors and daily users of the system, in all regions of the state. Four new COMLINC technician positions have been funded, and all have been hired and trained.

Network Operations Center (NOC) / Virginia Criminal Information Network (VCIN) Helpdesk

The Virginia State Police NOC has 13 operator positions and one supervisor who monitor the STARS Land Mobile Radio and point-to-point microwave radio systems statewide. They also monitor emergency power and environmental systems and make routine infrastructure inputs and changes that allow authorized users access to the network.

Along with monitoring the STARS Network, they are also the VCIN Help Desk support staff. They are providing support for VCIN and STARS around the clock, every day of the year.

New STARS Site Construction

During the initial network construction, the VSP Communications Division took over the engineering and installation of several subsystems of the STARS network, resulting in cost savings for the Commonwealth. STARS NOC personnel gathered locations and opened informational trouble tickets that enabled the engineers to test coverage to determine the best location for new sites. Subsequently, the Communications Division requested permission from the STARS Management Group to use the remaining funds from the Phase 5 bond to install additional land mobile radio sites to fill in coverage gaps in the original network. STARS Engineering proposes adding eight new sites to improve coverage for all user agencies.

Upgrades to STARS Infrastructure Network

The 2019 Legislature approved phased bond funding over four years for the following improvements:

Microwave Radios Replacement: AVIAT Networks was awarded the STARS statewide point-to-point microwave backhaul network replacement. The company has completed the installation and commissioning, and the entire system carries traffic.

Multiprotocol Label Switching (**MPLS):** We are converting our existing Time Division Multiplex (TDM) network architecture to a newer technology, Multiprotocol Label Switching (MPLS). MPLS has become the industry standard in data transport by discontinuing support for T1 technologies within our infrastructure. Therefore, STARS infrastructure utilizes NOKIA routers for conversion and future transport throughout the network. Testing and acceptance were completed on August 17, 2022.

Radio Authentication: This adds another layer of security to all subscriber radios in the STARS fleet. These features allow only properly registered radios to access the network and prevent radio cloning from spoofing the system. The infrastructure equipment installation is in place, and testing has been completed. This new system will be implemented as the new subscriber units are installed through the second quarter of 2024.

Time Division Multiple Access (**TDMA):** This converts the entire STARS Land Mobile Radio fleet to (TDMA) technology from the current Frequency Division Multiple Access (FDMA). This act will almost double radio traffic capacity because TDMA provides two radio voice conversations for each existing voice channel. This change required every STARS Federal Communications Commission (FCC) license to be modified, and the Commission has approved all the requested modifications. The infrastructure is in place, and initial testing has been completed. A petition for a waiver was filed and given by VSP

to the FCC to increase the talk-in power of the mobile radios. This act will increase the output of the radios from 60 watts to 100 watts, helping to improve coverage in known weak areas and enhance the ability of the mobile radios to reach tower sites. All sites are now live with TDMA.

Dynamic System Resilience (DSR): This system will provide real-time backup and switching between the Richmond and Salem zone controller cores in the event of a major failure. DSR will duplicate each location and provide uninterrupted redundancy without human intervention for a switch to occur. DSR is currently live and operational.

Subscriber Radio Replacement: Replacement of the entire STARS subscriber fleet (mobile, portable, and DVRS or equivalent) due to the existing radio platform (Motorola XTS/XTL) reaching the end-of-life and support, and this platform does not have the capabilities of Radio Authentication and TDMA. The Request for Proposal (RFP) closed on June 3, 2021, with two vendors responding, and was awarded to Motorola Solutions, Inc. on December 30, 2021, for $71,353,074. With the award, STARS will be the first statewide radio system in the nation to combine Public Safety Land Mobile Radio (LMR) with cellular Long-Term Evolution (LTE), increasing the system's capabilities and allowing features to be added as requirements change in operational needs. The installations were completed in June 2024.

The final project close-out is on track for completion in October 2024, under budget by over $20,000,000.