



Mark Gordon  
Governor  
K. Luke Reiner  
Director

# Wyoming Department Of Transportation

## PUBLIC SAFETY COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

### Meeting Minutes



Mark Harshman  
Chairman  
Telephone No.:  
(307) 777-4015

#### I. Call to Order

The Public Safety Communications Commission (PSCC) met in the I-80 Room, WYDOT-U Training Center in Cheyenne on Wednesday, July 14, 2021. Secretary Doug Frank presided, calling the meeting to order at 1:30 P.M.

#### II. Roll Call

The following members were present constituting a quorum:

Paul Bertoglio, Commissioner	Ron Gatti, Commissioner (via Zoom)
Matt Carr, Commissioner	Kebin Haller, Commissioner (via Zoom)
Mike Choma, Commissioner	Dwane Pacheco, Commissioner
Jonathan Downing, Commissioner	Luke Reiner, Ex Officio Member (via Zoom)
Doug Frank, Commissioner	

Chairman Mark Harshman and Commissioner Forrest Williams were absent.

#### III. Introductions

The following attendees participated in the meeting:

Troy Babbitt, Chief Technology Officer	Nathan Smolinski, Emergency Communications Manager
Neil Gardiner, WyoLink Support Manager	Aimee Binning, 911 Planning Coordinator
Kevin Hibbard, Director, State Budget Department	Kimberly Chapman, Commission Secretary
Mike Kahler, Senior Assistant Attorney General	Bryan Cawley, Federal Highway Administration

*Susan Elliott assisted with virtual meeting management.*

#### IV. Agenda Adjustments

No adjustments were made to the agenda.

#### V. Action Items

##### 1. Draft Meeting Minutes

It was moved by Commissioner Haller, seconded by Commissioner Bertoglio, and unanimously carried to approve the April 14, 2021, business meeting minutes.

2. WyoLink Applications

It was recommended by Mr. Gardiner, moved by Commissioner Pacheco, seconded by Commissioner Bertoglio, and unanimously carried to approve the applications from WYCO Volunteer Fire Department and Ciner Wyoming, LLC to join the WyoLink system.

3. Officer Elections

Chairman Harshman submitted two nominations by e-mail: Doug Frank for vice chairman and Dwane Pacheco for secretary. As there were no other nominations from the floor, Commissioners Frank and Pacheco were elected by acclamation.

VI. Updates/Discussions

1. Director's Update

Director Reiner presented his update.

COVID-19

The number of positive COVID-19 cases and employees in quarantine are increasing. Employees transitioned from telework to in-office work on July 1<sup>st</sup>, so an increase in cases was expected. The Wyoming Department of Transportation (WYDOT) continues to work through the telework agreement process, with 300 applications currently in progress. Most applicants plan to use a hybrid telework model, with the work week roughly split between telework and time spent in the office.

Budget

*Federal*

Surface transportation reauthorization is still in progress. The department hopes to see some sort of resolution before the end of September, but if legislation is not passed before then, a continuing resolution will be necessary.

*State*

WYDOT has just begun the budgeting process for its FY22 operating budget. The budget will be presented to the Transportation Commission in September for its review and approval.

Development of the state's FY22-23 budget is happening concurrently with WYDOT's process. The Governor's office must submit its budget to the legislature by early November, and Director Reiner felt that the state was on track to meet the deadline.

Personnel

One of the biggest challenges facing WYDOT, and the state, is employee recruitment and retention. WYDOT is authorized 2,044 full-time-equivalent positions, but there are currently over 200 vacancies. The effects of this shortage are far-reaching, affecting the organization at multiple levels. The director and other state agency heads have had conversations with the Human Resources Division about potential solutions, including employee compensation.

Following a question from Commissioner Bertoglio, Director Reiner shared more information on the vacancy types that WYDOT is struggling to fill. He reports that recruiting and retaining employees in entry-level positions—such as snow plow drivers, dispatchers, driver services, troopers, and port-of-entry officers—has been challenging. The director is also concerned with recent departures by individuals in mid-level positions.

#### Director's Trip to Teton County

The director is in Jackson this week visiting with city and county leaders and local legislators on pressing issues such as the future of the WYO 22 corridor and WYDOT's participation in a Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) grant awarded to Teton counties in both Wyoming and Idaho.

There was also a truck arrestor test on Teton Pass on July 13, 2021, following a previous arrestor failure. The manufacturer and testing agency developed upgrades for the system, and it was tested to regain the traveling public's confidence. For the test, the manufacturer hired a test driver, and WYDOT supplied an old plow truck carrying a load of sand and weighing approximately 58,000 pounds. The truck entered the arrestor at 60 mph and was successfully stopped before reaching the midway point.

Following a question from Commissioner Downing, Director Reiner provided an update on discussions that occurred concerning WyoLink at the Joint Transportation Committee (JTC) meeting on May 18-19, 2021. He informed the Commission that the Wyoming County Commissioners Association has taken the lead on this issue and formed a working group to discuss funding options for WyoLink, with support from WYDOT. The working group has met once, so discussions are in a preliminary stage.

Director Reiner also provided more information about the potential to obtain available funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) for WyoLink. It has been suggested to use those funds to replace Quantar radios and power supplies. With the special legislative session cancellation, discussions about ARPA funds will be a part of the traditional (state) budgeting process. Commissioner Bertoglio felt that it might take a concerted lobbying effort to convince the legislature that WyoLink is an immediate, critical funding priority. Director Reiner recommended that the Commission take some of the responsibility for direct engagement with legislators.

#### 2. Chief Technology Officer's Report

Troy Babbitt presented his update. The update also included information presented by Ms. Binning on Next Generation 911 (NG911).

#### Broadband Updates

As required by the recently passed HB 0014, WYDOT is reviewing policies and working with internet service providers to allow for fiber optic installations in highway right of ways. Further discussion is happening on expanding broadband access to more (rural) areas of the state and ensuring there is broadband/fiber optic connectivity to the WyoLink tower sites.

911

Mr. Babbitt reported that he, Mr. Smolinski, and Ms. Binning have attended several webinars to gather information on 911 best practices across Wyoming and the nation. Mr. Babbitt gleaned much useful information on planning, design, and implementation of NG911 from participation in the National 911 Program. During the program, it was shared that planning, leadership, and communication were the three pillars of success for effective implementation in other states. Those qualities will be critical components of the NG911 transition in Wyoming.

Implementing NG911 will require migration to a high-capacity broadband network. This would enable public safety answering points (PSAPs) across the state to receive texts, images, and videos during an emergency call. Working groups on governance, technology, outreach, and education, geographic information systems (GIS), and strategic planning are bringing together stakeholders to give input on this process.

It remains uncertain when the next national funding opportunities will be available for NG911. WYDOT continues to follow the Lead Infrastructure for Tomorrow's America (Lift America) Act. There is disagreement over some of the language and terminology in the bill, so it will need some revision before it can be debated and passed by Congress.

WYDOT will continue to survey PSAPs to determine what local partners would like to prioritize. These surveys, as examples from other states have shown, will help the department organize a granting process once federal funding is received.

Mr. Babbitt also reported that funds granted for 911 and NG911 cannot be diverted into other accounts or programs. He stressed the importance of creating and maintaining separate accounts for 911 fees and funds. If even one county diverts funds away from 911, the state could be responsible for repaying the whole amount allocated to Wyoming by the federal government.

NG911

Ms. Binning reported that the NG911 working groups have collaborated to identify and develop priorities. These priorities will help WYDOT determine what projects to fund if and when federal grants become available. The working groups, which are comprised of local partners, identified an urgent need to determine the current costs of 911 to better plan and budget for a transition to NG911. Pinpointing the exact cost of 911 services is difficult, and even states that have already implemented NG911 are struggling to ascertain the exact costs.

911 fees are collected at the local level; telecommunication companies pay fees directly to local governments. From reports filed with the Public Service Commission, 911 fees collected in 2019 totaled around \$5 million, but it cost \$9.5 million to operate 911 services. Per current legislation, up to 75 cents can be charged (per jurisdiction) for wire lines, VOIP calls, and wireless calls. A 1.5 percent fee is charged for prepaid services and collected by the Department of Revenue, which in turn disperses it to the counties.

Another issue uncovered by the working groups is governance. Currently, local communities have representation and a voice on NG911, but questions revolve around obtaining support from other entities.

Two reports have been filed for Wyoming. The 911 Fee Report was submitted to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), but Ms. Binning lacked much of the requested information on fees and expenditures. The reason for this was the 2020 data supplied to the PSC from the counties was incomplete.

WYDOT also submitted the 911.gov Report that tracks the progress towards NG911 by reviewing the number and types of PSAPs, the equipment and services provided by PSAPs, and training requirements. Currently, there are 40 emergency communication centers in Wyoming, and 29 of those are primary PSAPS and five sites are considered secondary PSAPs. The difference between primary and secondary sites is the ability to handle both wireless and landline 911 calls. Wyoming also has six dispatch centers.

Further dialogue between commissioners and staff centered on several issues including the accuracy of 911 fee collection and disbursement, PSAP regionalization, NG911 migration readiness and challenges, and PSCC's role and governance responsibility in regards to NG911.

3. Emergency Communications Program Manager's Report

Mr. Smolinski provided his update. The update also included information presented by Mr. Gardiner regarding WyoLink operations.

16 Tower Build-Out Report

Mr. Smolinski started his report with a slideshow of photographic updates showing progress at a few of the build-out sites.

Mr. Smolinski reported that the tower sites at Buffalo, Orin Junction, Wright, Jackson, Greybull, Lusk, Alva, and Alcova are online and operational. The first half of the sites in the above list are being closed out, and the rest of the sites only need a few more items completed before they can be closed out.

Construction is underway at the Rock Springs-Blairtown site, and the team is working with Sweetwater County to bring power/utilities to the site. Progress has been made at the Rock Springs-14 Mile Hill site; Mr. Smolinski estimates that it will be online in about eight weeks.

After a productive meeting with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), utilities are going to be run to the Ten Sleep-Meadowlark site. An application for right of way is at the State Lands Investment Office for the site in Northern Goshen County, and Mr. Smolinski thinks the approval process may still take another couple of months.

The team has had challenges getting access to the land at the Newcastle site, but the city of Gillette has helped the team come to an agreement with a private land owner for

access. Following a similar situation at the Evanston site, a right of way agreement is being finalized with private landowners, which will allow the team to schedule construction and utilities.

WYDOT and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) have made progress on the North Big Horn County site, and Mr. Smolinski remains hopeful that in one to two more months more results will be forthcoming. Three separate agreements with individuals and entities will be needed for access to the site on Kismet Peak near Bondurant.

Mr. Smolinski informed the Commission that user reports will be provided at the next meeting, which will show the volume of use for each tower.

Following a question from Commissioner Pacheco, Mr. Smolinski provided more information to the Commission on the recent outages experienced in Casper and neighboring areas.

#### Statewide Interoperability Coordination Updates

Mr. Smolinski thanked the commissioners for providing feedback on the PSCC 2021 Report before it was sent to the Governor's office.

The subscriber request for proposals (RFP) will be awarded and announced tomorrow at the Transportation Commission meeting. The RFP for subscriber radios was originally intended for Wyoming Highway Patrol (WHP) radios, but was then extended to all state agencies. The contract will allow WYDOT to offer the same price on the equipment to partnering entities across the state. After the RFP is awarded tomorrow, the department will be able to find a contract vendor and start the purchasing process.

Mr. Smolinski reported that he and his team are working with Sublette County, the Attorney General's office, and the county attorney on a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the Sublette Interoperable Radio System. The Emergency Communications team has also been working to expand access to the high frequency (HF) network to other agencies such as the BLM, Homeland Security, Wyoming State Parks, Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD), Wyoming Division of Criminal Investigation (DCI), Wyoming State Forestry Division, and the USFS. The high frequency network serves as a backup communication network. Once more sites are deployed around the state, WYDOT will invite local partners to participate.

Following a question from Commissioner Pacheco, Mr. Smolinski gave the commissioners a basic overview of the HF network. This network is a backup system, intended to be used for emergency communications in the case of a catastrophic failure of other networks or systems. The network utilizes a mix of receivers across the state to route communication, including the use of fixed-base stations located in Cheyenne, Casper, Rawlins, and Gillette and mobile units (also known as "deployables") located in Laramie, Evanston, Basin, Sheridan, and Douglas. System tests are performed weekly with Homeland Security to ensure connectivity and to determine how to direct [communication] traffic.

An Auxiliary Communications (AUXCOMM) technical assistance event will take place on August 27-29, 2021. During this event, amateur radio operators will be able to assist with emergency communications as needed.

Mr. Smolinski reported that his team will revise the Wyoming Field Operations Guide, which provides an overview of the Wyoming Interoperability Plan for operating on conventional channels and WyoLink talkgroups. The work to revise the document will occur over the next year and include stakeholder input.

Training will be offered once the RFP is awarded and the contract is signed so that the training can be tailored to the specific radio model from the contracted vendor. The training will also contain a general overview of the WyoLink system and its operation. Commissioner Haller shared that WHP troopers learn to use the WyoLink system through on-the-job training, but he felt that a consistent training offered to all system users and local partners would be beneficial. Mr. Smolinski shared that a WyoLink 101 training was offered at the WHP academy pre-COVID and that his team plans to offer it again, not only to new WHP troopers but to other agencies as well. Commissioner Pacheco shared that since not all agencies use radio capability as extensively as others, there was a need for a next-level WyoLink training to help users maintain their skills.

#### FirstNet Updates

WyoLink is currently working on three collocates with AT&T FirstNet, to bring three towers online: two in Fremont County and one in Lincoln County. AT&T has erected three additional towers in Cheyenne, Laramie, and Riverton to increase capacity. WYDOT will become a subscriber to FirstNet. Once the licenses are obtained, WYDOT will work with the WHP to conduct testing on data modems to determine functionality and coverage.

Conversations continue with AT&T FirstNet on how to leverage both the current and new system and offer interoperable capabilities. Much planning and coordination will occur to get the best interoperable solution—one that balances the benefits of increased coverage with the potential risks of bringing another system onto the pre-existing, mission-critical system. WYDOT will work with the Casper Police Department, which is already a FirstNet subscriber, to develop ideas and initial testing.

In response to Commissioner Downing's request, Mr. Smolinski explained that FirstNet would provide an additional path for agencies to connect to WyoLink. A FirstNet subscription would allow WyoLink radios to connect to cellular devices, so agencies that previously could not afford WyoLink equipment will have an affordable option to access the system. The cost of a FirstNet subscription depends on the agency, how many users, and number of sites. Therefore, it is not always a cheaper alternative to WyoLink. Mr. Smolinski did caution the Commission that FirstNet, unlike WyoLink, is not a mission-critical voice, so there is no guarantee that a dispatcher will be there to answer the call. Commissioner Downing suggested that WYDOT create a "cheat sheet" for the legislators on the JTC to quickly explain the difference between WyoLink and FirstNet.

WyoLink Operational Updates

Mr. Gardiner reported that an Emergency Communications technician, Jason Gilmor, has been reassigned to work in the WyoLink office. Mr. Gilmor will work four days a week to program radios; learn WyoLink infrastructure, operations, and maintenance; and evaluate a drone program. Drones have been employed to inspect radio towers and antennas.

The WyoLink office has partnered with the microwave team at Motorola to convert 10 sites between Cheyenne and Casper to Ethernet. The newly installed routers at these sites provide the connectivity to allow these sites to self-heal, which is the first step towards a more resilient system.

There were recently several unified network outages. Enterprise Technology Services (ETS) experienced a serious fire and flood in Casper, which led to cascading outages at other sites. The team has also been replacing end-of-life routers. Stronger relationships need to be built with ETS because of these events, and ETS has gained a greater understanding of WyoLink's mission-critical systems. ETS is now providing a more reliable connection to the sites on the unified network. Maintenance and outage alerts have been switched to the RAVE system.

*WyoLink Website*

Mr. Gardiner presented information to the Commission on proposed updates to the WyoLink website. Previously, the website focused on educating and informing citizens about WyoLink, but the team would like to target existing users and members. The changes are relatively minor with some content revision and the addition of two new pages for training and support. Mr. Gardiner invited commissioners to provide comments, feedback, or proposals for other new content.

**VII. Public Comment/Announcements**

There was no public comment.

*Commissioner Comments*

Commissioner Downing and Commissioner Frank requested that staff consider opportunities for commissioners to advocate for WyoLink funding whether it is to the legislature, other state agencies, or professional associations/groups. Where opportunities exist, the commissioners expressed a willingness to represent WyoLink provided they had adequate information and talking points.

**VIII. ADIJOURNMENT**

It was moved by Commissioner Bertoglio, seconded by Commissioner Haller, and unanimously carried to adjourn the July 14, 2021, business meeting at 3:17 p.m.