

Phase I Implementation in Rhode Island

By Ernest E. Ricci

In preparation for an April 1, 1998, Enhanced Wireless (Phase I) cutover, the Rhode Island 9-1-1 System was off to a running start. We had covered all the preliminary requirements: a funding mechanism was legislated with indemnification language included; wireless carriers were notified of our intent to provide enhanced wireless services and they were made aware that we generally agreed with the local exchange carriers solution to wireless interoperability concerns.

Then we heard from the other side and began to lose stride:

Wireless carriers presented some of their own preferable alternatives to the connectivity issue and the LEC expressed its reservation concerning certain data base access methods. Budget officials pressed for cost estimates; some wireless carriers required service agreements (contracts) before submitting cost estimates; the PSAP was not about to enter service agreements unless and until all wireless system upgrade costs were determined valid; and without a specific interconnection plan expressed by the PSAP, estimated costs may not have been relevant to begin with. So we began to form a circle with no beginning and no end.

Coordinating activities with the carriers became almost comical. Corporate mergers occurred seemingly on a monthly basis. Liaisons assigned to coordinate connectivity issues with the PSAP introduced themselves, then added that they expected to be transferred and relocated. It was Liaison "A" one day, followed by a period of inactivity on our end while the new corporation played musical chairs to determine who Liaison "A's" replacement would be. April 1, 1998, came and went, and to add to the gridlock, LEC switch modifications were not possible because the required components were not ready to be placed on the market, but as the pace slowed, the dust settled, giving us a better view of the direction in which we were heading.

It had become obvious that there were more players on the field than we had projected and that each preferred to play their own game by their rules. They were, after all, the masters of their domain; what did we know about wireless technology? Admittedly, the PSAP was absent anyone with the level of expertise sufficient to weigh all the alternatives and decide upon a viable plan, one which would provide the most economical wireless E9-1-1 service to the State of Rhode Island in a timely fashion.

To meet those expectations, one must necessarily understand the technical parameters and the interplay of all the component communications industries involved as well as those industries which provide the ancillary equipment, i.e. converters which provide the bridges between two otherwise incompatible technologies or components which expand the capacity of an otherwise limited communications element. Switches, converters, digital access communications systems, remote alternate data bases, software retrofitting, etc., all complex, specialized equipment and/or processes which require a PSAP representative with MIT- level technical credentials. We hired one.

A technical consultant was hired for a three (3) year period for the sole purpose of putting all the pieces together in the proper sequence, by the proper methods to produce a wireless E9-1-1 system which meets or exceeds the requirements of the Federal Communications Commission and the demands of public safety. Standards which will express our wireless E9-1-1 expectations in the areas of quality of service, quality of performance, and technical compliance are part of the consultant's efforts. The standards will incorporate NENA wireless standards and wireless industry standards generally with some modifications specific to Rhode Island PSAP conditions. It is also possible that the unexpected delays we experienced in the implementation of Phase I and the insights gained through that delay may result in a partial Phase II implementation in advance of the prescribed October, 2001, deadline; that is, a Phase I program which incorporates some of the Phase II technology.

The State will continue to emphasize cost effectiveness as we approach Phase II implementation, and will decide upon an ultimate course of action based in large part upon a correlation of costs to product.

In the meantime, we at the PSAP have the benefit of the most cost effective product we have purchased recently—a firm of technical consultants whose direct involvement in the wireless program has permitted us to manage the day-to-day function of the PSAP. We leave to them the task of untangling the snarls of the wireless implementation effort.

In addition, we have a staff attorney developing a universal service agreement (contract) form. Rather than having to scrutinize several agreements which includes the concerns of all the parties is the objective. We're proposing to approach service agreements with all carriers in two (2) parts. Part I would provide a trial and testing period. Part II would commit the parties to provide services for a longer term.

Wireless carriers serving Rhode Island have been submitting tower locations information in preparation for the assignment of Pseudo ANI numbers.

We will meet again in late October with all Rhode Island wireless carriers and present our Phase I solution which essentially offers flexibility to the wireless carriers as to connectivity, incorporates PSAP provided functionality and an alternative, neutral ALI data base.

We expect that service agreements will closely follow that meeting and Phase I wireless in Rhode Island will become a reality.

When? I'd rather try to forecast New England weather!