



**ALASKA LAND MOBILE RADIO EXECUTIVE COUNCIL
(A Federal, State and Municipal Partnership)**



MEMORANDUM FOR ALMR Executive Council

October 20, 2022

FROM: DOD Co-Chair

SUBJECT: August 18 Meeting Minutes

TO: See Distribution

Executive Council Members:

Colonel Timothy “Steiner” Meerstein	Department of Defense – ALCOM/J6
Chief Michael Kerle	Municipality of Anchorage – Anchorage Police Department (via teleconference)
Chief Alex Boyd	Alaska Municipal League – Anchorage Fire Department (via teleconference)

ALMR Support Team Members and Guests:

Mr. John Rockwell	User Council Chair
Mr. Dan Nelson	ALMR Operations Manager
Mr. Nikalus Fahnstock	ALMR System Manager
Mr. Trygve Erickson	Municipality of Anchorage (via teleconference)
Mr. Timothy Woodall	ALMR PM/COR – ALCOM/J6
Mr. Scott Stormo	Alaska Public Safety Communication Services
Mr. David Reed	Information Systems Security Manager (via teleconference)
Mr. Jim Nicholls	Motorola Solutions
Mr. Dave Patterson	Motorola Solutions
Mr. Mickey Flores	Motorola Solutions(via teleconference)
Mr. Mike Hawkins	Motorola Solutions (via teleconference)
Mr. Tim Thometz	Icom America (via teleconference)
Mr. Pete Rogell	BK Technologies (via teleconference)
Ms. Sherry Shafer	Operations Management Office (via teleconference)

1. **Call to Order.** Colonel Timothy “Steiner” Meerstein, Department of Defense (DOD) Co-Chair, called the meeting to order at 1:42 p.m. The roll was read.

2. **Opening Statements and Other Announcements.** Colonel Meerstein stated he and his family had arrived here in June, and he had replaced the previous Co-chair Colonel “Pudge” Davis. He noted that just as Colonel Davis had arrived here in the summer of 2020 from Robbins, he had also come from Robins Air Force Base at the 5th Combat Communications Group. Colonel Meerstein stated this was his family’s first time in Alaska, and that it was at the top of their list to be here. He added it was a pleasure to be here from a family perspective and also, he was happy to be a part of the Executive Council and part of the team.

3. **Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes.** Colonel Meerstein asked if the members had reviewed the draft meeting minutes from the February Executive Council meeting and if there were any requested changes. There were no requested changes.

Motion: Approve the February 23, Executive Council meeting minutes, as presented.

Colonel Meerstein made a motion for approval and Assistant Chief Alex Boyd seconded. There were no objections or further discussion. **The motion was carried and approved.**

4. **Old Business.**

a. SOA Quantar Replacement. Colonel Meerstein asked if there were any updates on the Quantar replacement project. Mr. John Rockwell advised he had no updates, but this would be covered under the Operations Management Office update.

b. State Interoperability Governing Body (SIGB). Mr. Rockwell briefed there was no new information. He added the Governor’s Administrative Order 333 had created the 9-1-1 governing body to look at all things regarding interoperable public safety communications, but he did not expect anything from them for the next six to eight months.

c. Long-term Cost Share Solution. Mr. Rockwell stated they were still working with the Governor’s Chief of Staff to develop a long-term funding solution, because capital requests are more difficult to obtain. He briefed it was not just funding for the upgrades involved, but also funding for maintenance and radios.

d. DOD Contract for System Upgrade. Mr. Timothy Woodall stated that all the Department of Defense (DOD) services had their funding, but the transportable units were not funded and will not get funded this year. He advised this does not affect the system as a whole moving forward, from an operational perspective.

Mr. Scott Stormo noted the State had gotten the task order added on the contract.

Mr. Woodall added that Motorola would send the invoices to him, and he would pass them on to the DOD service agencies.

e. DOD FY22 Budget. Colonel Meerstein stated the Federal government had moved from a continuing resolution to signing into law the Defense Authorization Act, and so funds have been dispersed. He noted they are at the end of FY22 and beginning of FY23 and indications right now in the onset are that they will continue to go into a continuing resolution, which means that what they experienced in FY22 is what they can anticipate again for FY23. Colonel Meerstein further clarified this would mean there would be a delay in their budget, and the disbursement of budgets to the other federal agencies, which would limit their ability to execute new contracts. He added this all remains to be seen, but he would expect a late timeframe for approval if it's approved and then initial distribution of funds at that time.

e. Fiduciary Responsibilities. Mr. Woodall explained the State and the DOD agreed that there needs to be some sort of interagency support agreement in place that covers fiduciary responsibilities of the parties who are participating in State of Alaska administrative contracts. He advised he purpose would be to define the responsibilities of the agencies who pay, the processes by which they would pay, an explanation of federal receipt authority, and the associated timelines for when received authority is effective and when it is not. In other words, you can't use the previous year's federal receipt authority to receive new funds. Mr. Woodall added this is somewhat foreign to the DOD and maybe some of the other federal payers and hopefully it would help them come up with the proper process and procedures to ensure payments are made on time. He stated Reservist attorney Major Lancaster was working on the document when she was last there and she will be coming back for reservist duty and hopefully she will have a shell to begin working with the State of Alaska and the other federal DOD entities to fill in the process, the procedures, and the stakeholders that would be involved/affected and in the end they would have an agreement that everyone will agree to, understand, and then implement, and that will help us in the future.

Mr. Rockwell asked if this included the Municipality of Anchorage.

Mr. Woodall stated it would include all of the ALMR agencies that would be required to administer any kind of fiduciary responsibility. He explained the initial reason was to address the issue with DOD agencies that don't typically deal with State agency-level contracts, whereas the DOD must follow the Federal acquisition regulations. Mr. Woodall advised with the State-administered contract, there isn't an agreement that ties the DOD to the procedures and the policies that they need to follow to ensure they comply with the State's contracting requirements of which the DOD is receiving services from.

5. User Council Update.

Mr. Rockwell briefed the User Council currently has two vacant positions, the US Army primary representative and the SOA Forestry primary representative. He added they also have two new members that have joined us, the first with the Federal non-DOD All others was Mr Bobby Carter from the TSA and the other was the DOT alternative, Mr. John Clendenin.

Mr. Rockwell added the user community is excited about the upgrades and they think the system is moving in a very positive direction.

6. Operations Management Office.

a. ALMR upgrade. Mr. Dan Nelson stated there are quite a number of upgrade projects that are in progress. He advised the GTR upgrade is the first one and we are closing in on the finish with the final site at Sunny Hay to complete before the system upgrade, but with the clouds still hanging over southeast, it's causing access issues. Mr. Nelson noted the System Management Office (SMO) is closely watching the weather to try and get that done. He advised the Atwood site in Anchorage was completed as of this last weekend.

Mr. Nelson briefed some of the pre work is proceeding for the core upgrade of the system software update that runs ALMR. He noted many of the dispatch consoles throughout the state are being upgraded as a prerequisite, and that's been happening all this week and that the vast majority here in the in the South zone are now complete and the upgrades in the North zone will continue next week.

Mr. Nelson advised the ALMR offices would be meeting with Motorola next Monday to discuss the proposed timeline for the actual system core update, which is projected to be done around the second week of October. He noted there are still some follow-on items to be addressed and others that are still up in the air.

Mr. Nelson stated the DOD is also working on their upgrades up North in Zone 2 which include some microwave and site updates.

b. Training. Mr. Nelson advised he had done a live training for our ALMR town hall in May that was focused on the TDMA upgrades, and it had approximately 45 attendees and recently posted a new vignette video to the web site. He explained the vignettes are five- or six-minute topical videos in the YouTube® style and the latest video talks about new radio features and considerations when purchasing new subscriber units.

Mr. Nelson briefed Motorola had provided a presentation yesterday to the state about some of the updates and some of the new options to subscriber units. He stated the Operations Management Office (OMO) recorded it and it would be posted shortly so folks unable to attend can get that recording.

Mr. Nelson advised he gave a presentation to the Region 10 Regional Emergency Communications Coordination Working Group (RECCWG) on "Why do we always blame technology?" He explained it was the same presentation he did for the International Wireless Communications Expo (IWCE) in March and talks about kind of the after-action

process and making sure our communication plans and things are up to date. We've got some follow-on training for communications planning for that same subject possibly coming out this winter.

Lastly, Mr. Nelson briefed he attended the Association of Public Safety Communications Officials (APCO) and the Motorola Technical Users Group (MTUG) meetings last week and there were some very interesting presentations about APCO's focus on 9-1-1 dispatch operators, as well as the convergence of technology when talking about interoperability for NextGen 9-1-1, which is very similar to what the ALMR system is doing with interoperability. He explained they are talking about pushing data around and pushing calls and in his opinion at this very, very early stage is perhaps some of the framework that the state is using for ALMR might be copied as the NG 9-1-1 solution. Mr. Nelson advised that must all go through the governor's board and it's a long way off, but certainly a topic for future discussion.

c. Annual membership agreement renewal. Mr. Nelson briefed the OMO is currently sending out the membership agreements for FY23 but are a little behind due to some budget delays. He noted that about 82 percent have been received back. Mr. Nelson pointed out the annual agreements outlines the costs for those that do have a fiduciary responsibility, and for the local agencies, municipalities, and volunteers it just confirms their participation in the partnership for another year.

d. System metrics. Mr. Nelson noted the monthly group and individual calls that have occurred on the system for the last few months and in June ALMR had the highest number since the OMO started keeping records in this way back to 2017. He added in July there was a decrease but compared to 2021, the numbers are still a significant increase in usage. Mr. Nelson explained he has looked closely at the metrics to find out exactly what pushed some of these increases, but he has not been able to tie it to a specific site, a specific incident, or to a specific area and it just seems that the top groups, whether that be AST or some of the big municipalities, they just simply were all much busier. He added that corresponding to the calls and PTT increases, our system busies also increased to 1,160 but that number is still lower than June of last year. Mr. Nelson attributed many of those busies to the Nenana site which had some wildfire operations that really pushed up the traffic. He briefed Nenana is a three-channel site, so the OMO worked with them to push some of their firefighting operations on other resources, which took the busies down, but this was a good example how the TDMA transition will help with capacity increases for the system.

Mr. Nelson stated there were a total of subscribers of 24,922, and that count goes up about 50 each month as people are replacing radios.

Mr. Nelson stated for the sites under three nines metric, we've had two high months with the July count tied to two separate incidents that happened in the system during the month. He explained the first one was a circuit outage that feeds the Southeast, and the telephone company had an outage that essentially took down all of the ALMR sites under it for a few hours, but we don't yet have an explanation for that, and it's still being worked on. Mr. Nelson added the other incident was right at the end of July in Zone 2

where there was a power issue. He stated there was a tremendous windstorm according to the reports of our users which caused a lot of power issues in that area, which included a failure at the Zone 2 master site. Mr. Nelson briefed each site for most systems provides for redundancy in their power systems and what happened is one side of the power distribution system at the master site failed, so everything that was connected to that a side went offline. He advised ALMR technicians responded and patched it to the other side to bring it back online, but that failure resulted in about three hours of downtime. Mr. Nelson stated the Army is now working on getting that solved.

7. New Business.

a. TDMA policy. Mr. Nelson stated as many folks are aware, the transition to TDMA technology has been a hot topic and one of the goals of many of these upgrades that are occurring. He noted there has been discussion for the past few years about this subject including the implementation of User Council (UC) policy in January of 2021 that all radios that are added to the system from that point forward must be TDMA capable. Mr. Nelson explained in preparation for this plan, the OMO came to the User Council a few months back as the upgrade was getting solidified and things were happening and advised them it was important to create a policy that essentially defined the timeline and what the deadline for the radios on the system that are still FDMA, the older technology. He noted the policy proportionately would affect smaller agencies and volunteers that may not have a capital budget to be able to instantly refresh their radio fleet. Mr. Nelson advised after gathering feedback from the members and gathering feedback from the User Council, the OMO and the UC created the transition policy contained in the meeting materials that were sent out.

Mr. Nelson referred to the screen as to the decision was to set a goal for December 31, 2026, to remove all FDMA radios from the system. However, he emphasized the User Council wanted it very clearly articulated that ALMR did not intend to remove FDMA radios if an agency could not meet that date. He explained the cognizance of supply chain issues, budget issues, and any number of things that may cause delays and the need to respect those folks that couldn't replace their subscribers, but also the need to acknowledge that if we don't have a plan for replacement, we won't be able to take advantage of new features that we just spent many millions of dollars in upgrades on. Mr. Nelson reminded the group one of the main features TDMA does for us is to essentially double the capacity of the system with the same hardware we already have in place.

Mr. Nelson referred back to the Nenana site which has three channels, one being a control channel which leaves two channels for voice. He explained TDMA would essentially make that into four channels and theoretically it would bring the site busies right down, so it certainly it would be a lot of help without having the upgrade hardware in areas where the sites get busy and where there's a lot of traffic.

Mr. Nelson stated the UC-adopted policy requires ratification by the Executive Council and then the OMO can go forward with the intent to continue outreach and education to clear any remaining confusion out there. He advised he planned on making individual

phone calls to each member agency to try and talk through their particular situation, make sure they understand what the timeline is, and that they understand what they need to do. Mr. Nelson briefed this is just another step in that evolution, but an important one that allows us to go forward and say this is our approved goal date

Mr. Woodall stated he had a comment with regard to TDMA and the ability of the users to use the TDMA. He pointed out they will have to do some modifications to the radio frequency assignments both on the FCC side of the house and the NTIA side of the house and to his knowledge there wasn't a line in the sand as to when the UC wants to have those systems licensed. Mr. Woodall advised in October the system would be able to operate TDMA, but they would not have the license to do so we do need to come up with some idea of a timeline for achieving that that spectrum authorization that would be required.

Mr. Nelson briefed he had discussed this with the state engineer that does licensing, and they have a rough plan to get those rolling. He noted he would probably need to talk to Mr. Woodall about the NTIA side and do them in concert because the frequencies are paired, then it would be good to publish to the users a date by which they can turn TDMA on because they may have a TDMA enabled radio and that radio may be able to operate on this fiscal year.

Mr. Woodall stressed that once the system can operate in TDMA, we would be in violation of our license and because our license is provided to us under special waiver and if we violated it any way, the waiver that we have to share frequencies between NTIA and the FCC. Would be in jeopardy. He added he wanted to make sure that users understand until we have licensing, we can't turn it on so that might need to be added to the motion.

Mr. Nelson clarified that at this point, that would be controlled at the system level, and the SMO would have to enable TDMA on those talkgroups. He added we could keep those talkgroups in the FDMA mode until such time as our licenses come through and then that wouldn't be necessary to have a change at the user level as we do have some way of controlling it.

Mr. Rockwell explained for the rest of the group that may not know that APSCS is responsible for the FCC license update and the NTIA license updates belong to the DOD. He asked Mr. Nelson if he would be helping coordinate the updates.

Mr. Nelson replied that it is on the task list, and he had been waiting for this meeting to occur to be able to move on. He advised he and Mr. Woodall will work together and start that process and added that TDMA won't be on the system until probably sometime next spring after all the juniper routers are in and the system has migrated to ethernet, so we still have some time ahead of us, but it is not happening in October with the 2021.1 upgrade.

Mr. Rockwell briefed the UC talked a lot about this and there was a lot of passion during the discussions because if you have a three-person volunteer fire department and all of

a sudden you have a \$21,000 bill to buy radios and you could barely buy gas for your truck, how can you say for sure you be able to do this by 2026? He noted that is why we emphasize that direction that we want to not force, but strongly encourage everybody who can do it as soon as possible and we need to provide dates for those that can budget for it, but at the same time, we're not precluding any current member, we're not going to kick them off. Mr. Rockwell added he was sure there would be other things coming up between now and then, possibly some grants to help out, but at this time the UC felt it was important to say here's the date and that they are going to be making sure that we are as close to 100 percent as possible as you move through the process.

Colonel Meerstein stated this was a really good background in perspective and it's a sound approach to put a timeline on there, but at the same time don't make it a requirement for users to continue to participate. He agreed as Mr. Rockwell said, there are small budgets, and we are in a resource constrained environment across all of our agencies and the economics of the situation with inflation right now in the current outlook doesn't look favorable. Colonel Meerstein asked how many current units we have on the system

Mr. Rockwell responded there were around 24,000 units online and although he did not know the percentage, he was sure a large percentage were still FDMA only and they are end of life radios that will have to be replaced.

Mr. Nelson advised he had conducted a very quick non-scientific inventory and approximately 14,000 radios on the system are still in that XTL XTS series. He pointed out that does not mean they are all active and in use, but potentially approaching two thirds of the total and that's just an example what a gargantuan task on a system as wide scale as this is.

At this point, Colonel Meerstein presented the proposed motion:

Motion: Approve the proposed TDMA timeline as presented from the User Council with the goal that no radios be terminated from the System.

The motion was seconded by Chief Michael Kerle. There were no objections. **The motion was carried and approved.**

b. ALMR FY24 Budget. Mr. Nelson explained that normally the OMO would be providing the FY24 Budget to the council at this time, but we are still waiting for some projections and infrastructure replacement information. He added once that information is gathered, the document will go to the User Council for their approval and then to the Executive Council for approval, but it is on the radar and pending.

8. Next Meeting. Colonel Meerstein noted the next meeting is scheduled for October 21 at 1:30p.m. in the Alaska Public Safety Communication Services conference room.

9. Adjourn Meeting. Colonel Meerstein asked if there was anything to add to the meeting and hearing no comments, he made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Motion: Adjourn the August 18 Executive Council meeting.

The motion was seconded by Assistant Chief Boyd. There were no objections. **The motion was carried and approved.**

The meeting adjourned at 2:23 p.m.

Timothy Meerstein, Colonel, USAF
ALCOM J6
ALMR Executive Council

Distribution:

SOA/DPS, Deputy Commissioner Leon Morgan
USNORTHCOM/ALCOM J6, Colonel Timothy “Steiner” Meerstein
FBI, Ms. Sarah Mueller
MOA, Chief Michael Kerle
AML, Assistant Chief Alex Boyd
OMO, Mr. Dan Nelson
SOA DPS, Mr. Scott Stormo
ALCOM/J64, Mr. Timothy Woodall
MOA, Mr. Trygve Erickson
SOA DPS, Mr. John Rockwell
SOA DPS, Mr. Buckley Clarke