



**ALASKA LAND MOBILE RADIO**

# **Alaska Land Mobile Radio Communication System**

## **Strategic and Operational Plan**

**Version 16**

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## Definitions and Acronyms

**Alaska Federal Executive Association (AFEA):** federal government entities, agencies, and organizations, other than the Department of Defense, that will operate on the shared ALMR system infrastructure.

**Alaska Land Mobile Radio (ALMR) Communications System:** the ALMR Communications System, which uses but is separate from the Alaska Public Safety Communications Service (APSCS), as established in the Cooperative and Mutual Aid Agreement.

**Alaska Municipal League:** a voluntary non-profit organization in Alaska that represents member local governments.

**Alaska Public Safety Communication Services (APSCS):** a State of Alaska (SOA) office in the Department of Public Safety (DPS) that operates and maintains the SOA Telecommunications System (SATS) supporting ALMR and provides public safety communication services and support to state agencies.

**Anchorage Wide Area Radio Network (AWARN):** the 700 MHz Anchorage node of ALMR. AWARN makes up Zone 4 of the system.

**Cooperative and Mutual Aid Agreement:** the instrument that establishes ALMR and sets out the terms and conditions by which the system will be governed, managed, operated, and modified by the parties signing the agreement.

**Communications Unit Leader (COML):** the individual that assigns frequencies or talk groups to the various user groups during an incident.

**Department of Defense – Alaska:** Alaskan Command, US Air Force and US Army component services operating under United States Pacific Command and United States Northern Command.

**Department of Public Safety (DPS):** a State of Alaska (SOA) department where the SOA Telecommunications System (SATS) and ALMR programs reside.

**Executive Council:** governing body made up of three primary voting members and two associate members representing the original four constituency groups: the State of Alaska, the Department of Defense, Non-DOD Federal agencies (represented by the Alaska Federal Executive Association), and local municipal/government (represented by the Alaska Municipal League and the Municipality of Anchorage).

**Federal Communications Commission (FCC):** for the purposes of ALMR, the Federal level governing body that approves the use of commercial, maritime, state, local and other agencies that are not a part of the Department of Defense or other Federal



agencies radio frequency spectrum through the issuance of radio station authorizations once coordination with all potentially affected agencies has been completed. The approvals will in most cases (exceptions might be waivers or special temporary authority) be for use of a particular portion of a frequency band that has been pre-authorized through the frequency band table of allocations. In addition, the FCC maintains the communications tower registration program.

**Interoperable Communications:** the ability of public safety, including emergency and other first responders, to talk to one another via radio and other communication systems, and to exchange voice and/or data with one another on demand in real time.

**ICTAP:** Interoperable Communications Technical Assistance Program.

**IP:** Internet Protocol

**LMR:** Land Mobile Radio

**Member:** a public safety agency including, but not limited to, a general government agency (local, state, or federal), its authorized employees and personnel (paid or volunteer), and its service provider, participating in and using the system under a Membership Agreement.

**MHz:** Megahertz

**Municipality of Anchorage (MOA):** the MOA covers 1,951 square miles with a population of over 300,000. The MOA stretches from Portage, at the southern border, to the Knik River at the northern border, and encompasses the communities of Girdwood, Indian, Anchorage, Eagle River, Chugiak/Birchwood, and the native village of Eklutna.

**National Incident Management System (NIMS):** a unified approach to incident management, standard command, and management structures with emphasis on preparedness, mutual aid, and resource management.

**OIT:** Office of Information Technology

**Operations Manager:** represents the User Council interests and makes decisions on issues related to the day-to-day operation of the system and any urgent or emergency system operational or repair decisions. In coordination with the User Council, the Operations Manager establishes policies, procedures, contracts, organizations, and agreements that provide the service levels as defined in the ALMR Service Level Agreement.

**Operations Management Office (OMO):** develops recommendations for policies, procedures, and guidelines; identifies technologies and standards; and coordinates



intergovernmental resources to facilitate communications interoperability with emphasis on improving public safety and emergency response communications.

**P25 Radio:** a Project 25 compliant control station, console, mobile, or portable radio assigned to the system that has a unique identification number.

**P25 Standards:** the P25 suite of standards involves digital Land Mobile Radio (LMR) services for local, state, and national (federal) public safety organizations and agencies. P25 is applicable to land mobile radio (LMR) equipment authorized or licensed, in the U.S., under the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) or Federal Communications Commission (FCC) rules and regulations.

**Protocol:** a standard that governs network communications by providing a set of rules for its operation.

**RF:** Radio Frequency

**SME:** Subject Matter Expert

**Standard Operating Procedure (SOP):** includes workflow diagrams, roles, and responsibilities, etc. to clearly define work procedures.

**State of Alaska (SOA):** the primary maintainer of the State's microwave system, and shared owner of the system.

**System Management Office (SMO):** the team of specialists responsible for management of maintenance and operations of the system.

**Talkgroup:** the electronic equivalent of a channel on a trunked system; a unique group of radio Users that can communicate with each other.

**UHF:** ultra-high frequency

**User:** an agency, person, group, organization, or other entity which has an existing written membership agreement with one of the parties to the agreement. The terms user and member are synonymous and interchangeable.

**User Council:** governing body responsible for recommending all operational and maintenance decisions affecting the system. Under the direction and supervision of the Executive Council, the User Council has the responsibility for management oversight and operation of the system. The User Council oversees the development of system operations plans, procedures and policies under the direction and guidance of the Executive Council.

**VHF:** Very-High Frequency



## **1.0 Introduction**

The strategic and operational process is an integrated and comprehensive program of planning which considers, at a minimum, the future impact of current decisions, overall policy, organizational development, and their links to fulfilling successful daily operations.

The purpose of this plan is to determine the how, when, and where the Alaska Land Mobile Radio (ALMR) Communications System will be going over the next year and what support to expect from the Operations Management Office (OMO). To ensure that ALMR continues to provide high-quality, standards-based, interoperable communications for its users, it is essential that there be a proactive OMO Strategic and Operational Plan that recognizes the many challenges facing the organization in both the short and long term. Strategies and operational processes that identify and capitalize on the unique strengths and contributions of all the ALMR stakeholders must be developed, implemented, sustained, and modified, when necessary.

This document is not intended to be all inclusive and will evolve as conditions, management controls, processes, and procedures dictate.

Common themes for achieving both strategic and operational successes are identified as:

- Creating a common understanding of communications interoperability throughout the State and establishing it as a high priority.
- Providing leadership in the development of policies and guidelines that support the Statewide Interoperable Communications Plan for Alaska.
- Promoting and maintaining collaborative partnerships to maximize existing, and future, interoperable communications equipment, systems, and resources.
- Establishing and following coordinated communication protocols for emergency response and utilizing plain/common language to the fullest extent.
- Maximizing interoperable capabilities by using existing communications systems and equipment.
- Planning for the implementation of selected future ALMR updates/refresh technologies.
- Enhancing user knowledge and proper use of ALMR.
- Promoting and assisting with the development of future funding strategies to maintain ALMR and to provide for the technology refresh at pre-determined intervals.

## **2.0 Roles and Responsibilities**

### **2.1 Executive Council**



At the time of ALMR's inception, the Executive Council (EC) responsibilities, as defined in their charter, included developing a set of requirements and a migration plan to transition from all the aging communication systems that were in use in Alaska to a single, shared, wide-area, trunked radio system. A critical requirement in the development of the system was ensuring the ability for public safety responders to transition seamlessly. To meet these goals, the EC decided upon a cost-shared, Project 25/TIA-102, trunked LMR communications system.

Having met that challenge, the EC is now responsible for maintaining the consortium approach to governance that is required for the continued operation, maintenance, and management of ALMR. The EC must ensure ALMR remains compliant with federal, state, and local regulatory guidance and is responsive to mission needs of participating public safety agencies in the State of Alaska.

The EC accomplishes this task by reviewing the need for changes to the infrastructure and its operational system software as technologies advance and by providing solid guidance to the funding bodies on which they can plan future budgets.

## **2.2 User Council**

The authority for the creation and operation of the User Council (UC) is derived from Article 7 of the ALMR Cooperative and Mutual Aid Agreement. The UC functions under the rules of governance contained in the Cooperative and Mutual Aid Agreement and under the guidance and oversight of the EC.

The UC, in cooperation and coordination with the Operations Manager, will provide guidance and operational oversight of ALMR.

## **2.3 Operations Management Office**

The OMO works with the EC, UC, and stakeholders, and acts as their single point of contact for all ALMR-related issues and requests. The OMO ensures that the day-to-day operation and maintenance of ALMR is performed to the agreed upon levels in the Service Level Agreement (SLA) and documents known areas of non-compliance.

In addition, the OMO provides oversight of, and lateral coordination with, the System Management Office (SMO), who is the contracted maintenance entity, as well as the State of Alaska (SOA) Alaska Public Safety Communication Services (APSCS).

## **3.0 Approach**

Strategic planning reflects the discussions and ideas for creating a vigorous operations management approach for all ALMR functions. Mandates, environmental factors, funding challenges, expansion opportunities, and other strategic issues identified by stakeholders have been considered.





The following roles and responsibilities address pertinent areas regarding ALMR activities, which are further referenced in the High-Level Strategy and High-Level Communications Strategy.

- Strategic planning
- Operations management
- System management oversight
- Information management oversight
- Outreach and education
- Finance and budget
- Quality control/risk management
- Internal/external communications
- Administrative activities
- Statewide Interoperability Plan

### **3.1 Critical Issues**

Building blocks for developing the mission statement, short- and long-term visions and strategies, core values, and planning goals for ALMR and its stakeholders are:

- Eliminating duplication of efforts by maximizing resource sharing through partnerships,
- Validating the need for functional guidelines, both operational and technical, to provide Department of Defense (DOD), Federal Non-DOD, State, city, borough, and tribal entities, with regional communications interoperability through Incident Command common use talkgroups and channels.
- Leveraging limited funding for ALMR enhancements through an assessment and “buy-in” approval process, and
- Recognizing and preparing for the time criticality of responses to natural and/or technological hazards, terrorism, etc.

### **3.2 Framework**

Once high-level strategic goals have been established, the next step is to identify an annual planning cycle that provides a means to measure successes, setbacks, and areas that require improvement.

The final step is developing the framework for strategic and operational implementation of established goals.

The framework reflects previous discussions and builds on the successes that ALMR has already achieved. It is expanded through the mission and vision statements, as well as the values and strategic goals required for continued ALMR success.



## **4.0 Planning Lifecycle**

The developed annual strategic and operations planning lifecycle implements and measures the success of this plan. The lifecycle consists of four stages:

- Planning
- Buy In
- Implementation
- Assess and measure

### **4.1 Planning**

During the planning stage, the Strategic and Operational Plan is updated and enhanced by the OMO.

Recommendations from the previous year and the current situational environment are considered to:

- Add new initiatives to be accomplished in the upcoming year.
- Update and carry over incremental initiatives from the previous year that are still relevant.
- Remove initiatives that have been completed.
- Add new information to provide stakeholders with the most up-to-date information on the status of ALMR operations, maintenance, system enhancements and communications interoperability within Alaska.

Once these steps are accomplished, the updated plan is approved by the UC.

### **4.2 Buy In**

Once committee recommendations are approved and a course of action is determined, the process of achieving "Buy In" from all necessary stakeholders on the local, tribal entity, regional, state and federal levels begins. This is accomplished through information sharing, collaborative sessions, and briefings. Periodic follow-up with stakeholders is recommended to ensure continuity and continued "Buy In."

### **4.3 Implementation**

This is the longest stage of the planned lifecycle and requires stakeholders to bring expertise and experience together, to achieve established initiatives.

Key activities may include:

- Identifying working committees to assist in the achievement of initiatives.



- Developing a roadmap and project plan for presenting recommendations to move towards “Implementation” of desired initiatives.
- Convening the governance groups (UC and EC) to review progress of initiatives and recommendations.

As new recommendations are made, or priorities change, during the “Implementation” stage, and are subsequently accepted by the members of the governance structure, they move towards completion of the “Buy-In” stage. Initiatives not approved, or requiring additional work for acceptance, remain in the “Implementation” stage to measure and plan for in the following calendar/fiscal years. Complex initiatives may take multiple years to achieve completion of “Buy In,” while others may be institutionalized more quickly.

#### **4.4 Assess and Measure**

Performance should be measured annually for both short- and long-term outcomes.

This requires:

- Maintenance of a baseline inventory of ALMR equipment, frequencies, emergency plans, and tactical interoperable communication plans,
- Soliciting input from stakeholders on current goals,
- Analyzing the performance against the established criteria, and
- Developing an annual report that shows progress, setbacks, and areas that require improvement.

#### **5.0 Communications**

The communications strategy encourages all internal and external stakeholders to recognize their roles. By establishing a reasonable communications methodology with obtainable goals and objectives, the OMO develops external relationships and improves the culture of the organization.

##### **5.1 Methodology**

The communications strategy is comprised of five steps:

- Identify the audience,
- Analyze the needs of each stakeholder,
- Identify communications channels,
- Determine what information is to be provided, and
- Develop an on-going dissemination avenue for information.



## **5.2 Mechanisms Employed**

The mechanisms employed are addressed in the High-Level Communications Strategy.

## **5.3 External Communications**

The focus of external communications is to raise the regional, statewide, and national profile of ALMR and the OMO, as well as improving its image and identity using appropriate communications mechanisms.

Specific goals and objectives are addressed in the High-Level Communications Strategy.

## **5.4 Internal Communications**

The focus of internal communications is open dialogue between all levels of the organization. The key element of internal communications is continuous dialogue between the stakeholders. Dialogue cannot be delegated to just one individual; all participants must maintain clear and open channels of communication and information sharing within the ALMR organizational structure.

The specific goals and objectives are addressed in the High-Level Communications Strategy.

## **6.0 Governance**

A successful interoperability plan requires leadership participation among all levels. An established governance structure ensures key stakeholders have an on-going role in the planning, design, implementation, and maintenance of the chosen communications infrastructure.

When local public safety practitioners are the primary users of the communications system, they should be involved from inception through implementation, as well as through the duration of the system life cycle.

ALMR applies a consortium approach and operates as a cooperative effort of the State of Alaska, DOD, Federal Non-DOD agencies, local agencies, and tribal entities. Oversight of ALMR is provided by the Executive Council. Operations and maintenance decisions are coordinated with the User Council, which is made up of members representing each of the four cooperative partners.



Case examples illustrate that by enrolling the majority of local representatives on the leadership team, states establish trust at the local level which, in turn, eases barriers to cooperation and implementation. Governance structures that incorporate a participatory, inclusive, and a locally driven approach toward decision making find success in the Implementation phase of a statewide system.

## **7.0 Action Plan**

In developing an action plan, the OMO considers the internal support structure, as well as the lateral relationship with SOA APSCS.

Operational activities are divided into seven major topics.

- Strategic operations and policy
- Budget development
- Documentation
- Daily operations
- Technical operations
- Outreach and education
- Quality Assurance/Quality Control

## **8.0 Priority Issues and Strategic Goals**

### **8.1 Priority Issues**

Although there are always operational tasks that need to be accomplished, it is necessary to prioritize those areas that require immediate attention. These are ranked by their importance to the operation of ALMR and are essential to establishing an effective operations organization.

The following areas are currently deemed as priority issues and must continue to receive urgent attention.

- Maintaining the OMO as a viable organization that the EC, UC, and stakeholders utilize for their ALMR-related issues/requests,
- Continuing to work with the EC, UC, and stakeholders to develop and execute maintenance agreements that ensure SLA standards are clearly defined and met,
- Continuing to demonstrate to existing ALMR users the value of ALMR in meeting their day-to-day communications and incident response requirements,
- Promoting and encouraging potential new users to come onto ALMR, and
- Promoting the development of a long-term funding strategy at the State level.



## **8.2 Strategic Goals**

The following list of strategic goals, as presented and expanded in the High-Level Strategy, considers the available organizational resources and the implementation of management controls.

- Foster innovation and creativity
- Institutional excellence
- Leadership
- Stakeholder services
- Foster partnerships
- Technical expertise
- Enhance ALMR
- System reliability
- Outreach and education
- Cost share consensus
- Operations services
- Institutional controls
- Information management
- Risk management

## **9.0 Initiatives**

The following 2023 initiatives are derived from current work and projects occurring within OMO, as well as other stakeholder work.

Each initiative is a steppingstone towards achieving one or more of the OMO strategic goals outlined in Section 8.2 and is grouped into five categories.

- Outreach
- Governance
- Technology
- Operations
- Training

### **9.1 Outreach**

Outreach initiatives are intended to bring interoperability information to Alaska practitioners, elected officials, and other stakeholders. They focus on development of standardized materials, maintaining and updating the web site, providing information on grants and other possible funding assistance, and disseminating technical information throughout the user community.



9.1.1 Develop, distribute, and promote interoperable communications information to stakeholders.

- Plan and conduct an annual Alaska Interoperable Communications Conference (i.e., Annual User Council Conference), when/if funding is available. Look for opportunities to cooperate with other events to reach users as available.
- Update and maintain the ALMR web site and promote a resource library of local, state, and federal interoperable communications information.
- Provide web links to national initiatives such as Project 25 (P25) and National Incident Management System (NIMS), whenever applicable.
- Communicate information about grant writing training and assistance and available grant programs or seminars, when available.
- Promote the Interoperability Communications Technical Assistance Program (ICTAP).

9.1.2 Communicate the importance of continued existence of ALMR.

- Provide and distribute interoperable communications newsletters (quarterly ALMR *Insider* newsletter).
- Attend workshops, seminars, and other public gathering forums to promote the use of ALMR.
- Assist new users with transition process.
- Keep current users well informed on system expansions, upgrades, and enhancements.

## **9.2 Governance**

Governance initiatives foster, maintain, and enhance the interoperability efforts in Alaska by involving an increased number of practitioners in the process.

9.2.1 Sustain the interoperability effort.

- Collaborate to develop and gain approval/support of a long-term strategy to maintain Alaska's interoperability effort.
- Collaborate in the development of, and gain approval for, a statewide investment plan for interoperable communications.
- Utilize the budget processes to identify revenue generation strategies for sustained funding.

9.2.2 Support existing governance structure and all interoperability coordinating organizations by ensuring appropriate representation on the UC by all major stakeholders.



### **9.3 Technology**

Technology initiatives allow for the coordination of major asset investments that increase the ability of practitioners to respond to major emergencies. In addition, the initiatives identify technological gaps within the different regions of Alaska.

Technology development continues through:

- MotoBridge® gateways/WAVE at multiple locations,
- Review of potential expansion capabilities,
- System technology refresh updates,
- End-of-life replacement of aged equipment,
- Researching ways to incorporate new and emerging technologies, and
- Reutilizing replaced equipment to expand channel capacity at smaller sites or maintain the equipment as spares.

### **9.4 Operations**

Operational initiatives help overcome technical and institutional barriers to improve day-to-day user communications, as well as responses to major emergency situations.

9.4.1 Promote approved Interoperability Zone common use talkgroups and ensure users have transitioned to the updated lineup.

9.4.2 Update, gain approval of, and execute the necessary shared-use agreements for ALMR.

- User agreements
- Maintenance agreements
- Site cooperative use agreements
- Cost share agreements

9.4.3 Update, and gain approval of, interoperable communications documentation through annual review of all plans, policies, and procedures.

9.4.4 Encourage utilization of the approved plain/common language best practices protocol for tribal entities, and local, state, and federal government LMR users.

9.4.5 Identify and promote the use of nationally recognized Federal Communications Commission (FCC) designated interoperability channels that can be used within Alaska.





## **9.5 Training**

Training initiatives provide and exercise a standardized definition of interoperability and help all levels of government practice and improve upon localized procedures, as well as the escalation process of incident management.

9.5.1 Plan for, participate in, and provide interoperable communications support exercises, when/if funding is available.

9.5.2 Endorse the Communications Unit Leader (COML) concept and encourage NIMS certification within Alaska.

- Monitor COML curriculum development at the Federal level
- Encourage completion of IS100 and IS700 NIMS training

## **10.0 Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis**

An important step in responding to the rapidly changing environment facing ALMR and the OMO is developing an understanding of the external and internal context within which both operate. This involves an analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

This list is by no means all inclusive. However, it provides a useful “snapshot in time” for the on-going development and refinement of the strategic planning framework. Key items are:

### **10.1 Strengths**

- Wide-area presence
- Interoperability provided to public-safety first responders
- Incident command structure zones programmed in the radios
- P25 standards-based system allows multiple vendors
- Increasing number of users
- Quality state, federal, local, and tribal entity involvement
- Two geographically separated transportable units capable of establishing communications within most Alaska locations in the event of catastrophic disaster (**NOTE:** The transportables were not upgraded during the 2021.1 system software upgrade and are currently not funded.)
- Future expansion of coverage along the Alaskan Highway system; continued expansion of ALMR to Southeast Alaska and potential expansion into Southwest Alaska and beyond
- In-building and tunnel communications
- Governance structure



## **10.2 Weaknesses**

- Limited trunked channel availability outside major population areas
- System busies at remaining three-channel sites due to lack of resources
- Inability to expand ALMR due to lack of long-term funding possibilities
- Harsh Alaskan environment, inability to travel, when required, to some remote mountain sites due to weather conditions
- Limited participation/use of ALMR by some regions
- Limited participation and support of the User Council by some areas/organizations
- Limited awareness and understanding among lawmakers and key state decision makers about what ALMR is, why it exists, and its statewide importance for Public Safety response.

## **10.3 Opportunities**

- System ability to accommodate new user agencies
- Cost savings and seamless interoperability over legacy conventional radio equipment and systems
- System expansion capability
- Increased training and exercise opportunities (when funded)
- Ability to re-write/improve plans and procedures for daily use and integration into major incidents
- Incorporate new technology to expand coverage, use cases, and efficiency
- Promote state and federal grant awareness and match-making prospects
- Use of technology platforms to promote awareness and establish the Alaska Land Mobile Radio brand

## **10.4 Threats**

- Yearly uncertainty of funding for long-term sustainment, system refresh/upgrade requirements and equipment replacement at end of useful life
- Inability to complete ALMR build-out, as designed
- Inability to expand or enhance current coverage footprint due to lack of funding
- Possible pullout or limited participation of key stakeholders due to changing communications requirements and missions or lack of proper funding
- Failure of key stakeholders to identify critical infrastructure and implement proper in-building solutions to ensure adequate coverage
- Grant funding guidance and rules for expenditure too restrictive for some communities
- Natural disasters and man-caused destruction of infrastructure



## **11.0 Conclusion**

The OMO maintains continued visibility of the strategies, initiatives, and on-going issues outlined in this plan and reviews each one, at least annually, to ensure current areas of focus are represented and those areas which have been resolved, or are no longer relevant, are removed.

The User Council is responsible for the formal approval of the Strategic and Operational Plan, and any substantial revisions hereafter.