

EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS SERVICE DELIVERY IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

**Police Communication Centres and 911 Public Safety Answering
Points**

STRATEGIC VISION SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION COMMENTS

JULY 2015



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Highlights

- Since the 911 system was implemented in the late 1980s, local governments have continuously worked on improving service delivery. However, times and technology have changed and there is now an opportunity to revisit and renew the overall approach to 911 service delivery given the number of challenges related to:
 - Migration of households from landline to wireless telephone service;
 - Implementation of Next Generation 911 (NG911) technologies;
 - Gaps in the provision of 911 service;
 - Ensuring resilience of the 911 system amid major catastrophic events.
- The Ministry of Justice distributed a Discussion Paper in April 2015 and held an in-person consultation forum in Vancouver on June 1, 2015, seeking feedback from key stakeholders on the Ministry's strategic vision for emergency communications in British Columbia.
- The Ministry's strategic vision includes a consolidated 911 Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) and police communications service delivery model, with enhanced support from new revenue raised through a provincial Call Answer Levy (CAL) on wireless devices. Feedback on the Discussion Paper was requested by May 15, 2015. In total 15 responses were received and 40 participants attended the one day consultation forum.
- The Ministry heard from Regional Districts and municipalities that operate their own 911 PSAPs, First Nations Emergency Services, RCMP, BC Association of Chiefs of Police, BC Association of Police Boards and the BC Police Association, E-COMM and CREST, TELUS and other wireless service providers, BC Emergency Health Services, Fire Chiefs Association of BC, Industry Canada, DND and others.
- Stakeholders were requested to comment on the 3 components to the strategic vision: service delivery, governance and the CAL on wireless devices.
- There was general support for service delivery consolidation and implementation of a provincial CAL.
- Key themes raised, and outlined in this summary report, include:
 - Approach consolidation in a thoughtful manner by considering the particular needs and attributes of individual jurisdictions, including variances between rural and urban areas;
 - Ensure costs for consolidation can be addressed through any future funding model;
 - Develop a set of minimum standards for all functions in the emergency communications system to reinforce consistency while being flexible enough to accommodate local nuances;
 - Ensure the new governance model represents a diverse group of stakeholders including, but not limited to: local authorities, provincial government, federal government, police and emergency services, regional district authorities, E-COMM, and telecommunication service providers;
 - Put a CAL on all devices capable of triggering a 911 response, this includes landlines, wireless devices and new and emerging technologies;
 - Establish greater clarity and understanding of the scope of components within the emergency communications system to be governed and funded by the new CAL;
 - Delegate responsibility to a central body/agency to collect, administer, and dispense CAL revenue and clarify the roles of the provincial government, local authorities and other key stakeholders in this process; and
 - Engage and communicate with the public as changes to the system are agreed to and implemented.

Part 1: Background to the Consultation Process

Background

The current 911 system was implemented in the late 1980s, when technology was predominantly landline telephone services (landlines). Today, more households are abandoning landline services in favor of wireless services, and Next Generation 911 (text and images) is expected to be complex and costly. In the recently released Earthquake Consultation Report, consultation chair Henry Renteria raised the need for the provincial government, local authorities and key partners to assess opportunities to enhance the resiliency and capacity of the 911 system. System resiliency, that is the ability to function effectively regardless of adverse circumstances, is critical to public safety.

Given these challenges, the Ministry of Justice (the Ministry) reached out to key stakeholders for input to inform the future of emergency communications across the province involving 911 and police communication centres. By modernizing the current approach to a more streamlined, equitable and resilient emergency communications system, services and public safety will be enhanced province-wide.

The Ministry provides overall direction respecting police services in the province and ensures there are adequate and effective levels of policing. Although 911 Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) is a local government responsibility and not a policing function, dispatching of police related calls is and the two functions are inextricably linked. Local governments have worked to manage and improve service over the years, and the Ministry values the role of local government as a key stakeholder in the provision of 911 PSAP.

Consultation Process

On April 17 and 20, 2015, the Discussion Paper was distributed to key stakeholders and experts inviting them to provide feedback and input on the future state of emergency communications in British Columbia. At the same time, stakeholders were invited to attend a consultation forum. The morning of the session provided a number of subject matter expert presentations which focused on providing stakeholders with context and a common language to support the afternoon discussions. Input to the consultation process was therefore received by way of:

Written feedback – stakeholders were asked to provide a written response to a list of questions by May 15, 2015.

Verbal feedback – stakeholders participated in the one-day emergency communications stakeholder consultation forum on June 1, 2015 held in Vancouver.

Profile of Respondents

All feedback submitted, through written submissions and in person at the consultation forum, was documented for review and consideration by the Ministry*.

1. Written Submissions	
Local governments	7
Police agencies/PSAP	3
Telecommunications companies	2
Federal organizations	2
Universities	1
Total	15
2. Forum Participants	
Local governments	20
Police agencies	9
First Nations	2
BC Emergency Health Services	1
Fire Chiefs Association of BC	1
BC Search and Rescue Association	1
E-COMM	6
CREST	1
Independent (Consultants)	2
Federal government	1
Total	44

*Ministry staff also met with the UBCM Community Safety Committee on April 16, 2015 and the Association of 911 Service Providers of BC on May 13, 2015.

Part 2: What we Heard – Themed Responses and Comments

This section provides a high level overview of the themed responses from the perspectives of the stakeholders who responded in writing to the discussion paper or who attended the consultation forum.

Service Delivery

Current model

Some stakeholders believed that the current system is effective, ensures necessary redundancy and provides unique 911 PSAP and police dispatch services based on local needs. The current system allows for communities to set unique service levels and control the tone and culture of the callers' experience.

Consolidation

The majority of stakeholders believed that consolidation was the best option for the future of emergency communications services, resulting in increased efficiency and the ability to address challenges facing the system.

For example, consolidation of PSAPs could provide the economies of scale required to make Next Generation 911 more affordable. Stakeholders noted that rolling out any new 911 features would be more difficult when there are many different centres each requiring updated equipment, technology, testing, training, and funding.

Other challenges to be addressed through consolidation were noted as follows:

- Lack of redundancy and back up;
- Inconsistent standards across the province;
- Inability to access new and better technology; and
- Finding sustainable funding sources, which is especially difficult in rural and remote areas where there are small populations.

There was a sense that PSAPs serving larger geographical areas and populations were going to be more efficient than PSAPs serving smaller areas and populations. Geographic differences and local needs would need to be considered in a consolidated model. Others noted that consolidation does not necessarily mean that individualized and specialized service has to stop. The specific requirements of individual jurisdictions can be addressed with appropriate training of staff and the use of technology.

It was mentioned that the consolidated service delivery model will require a consistent set of minimum standards, and will have to be aligned with telecommunications service providers and system integration partners to ensure success. In emergency situations, designated back up PSAPs will be able to better support each other if they have similar standards, equipment, and training. The need for consistent procedures in responding to abandoned calls and “pocket dials” was also mentioned.

Some stakeholders also noted that cost effectiveness of moving to a consolidated model would need to be ensured.

Public expectations

Implementation of a consolidated service delivery model and new technologies needs to be aligned with the public needs and wants. It will be important to have an effective communications strategy to help the public better understand the limitations and benefits of consolidation to ensure their expectations are aligned with what is realistic.

Governance

Scope and structure

Stakeholders noted that the scope, structure, and roles and responsibilities of a governance body would

need to be clear to ensure a consistent understanding. The role of local government versus the provincial government should be clear.

An advisory committee structure was cited as an option. Stakeholders mentioned a number of considerations for successful governance implementation, as follows:

- The governance model should include representation from a diverse group of key stakeholders working within a collaborative decision-making environment;
- The implementation of the governance model needs to be incremental – if too much is undertaken at once, it will be difficult to implement;
- Best practice alternatives should be explored by investigating what is working well in other jurisdictions.

Standards

The majority of stakeholders noted that minimum standards should be established by the Provincial Government with local stakeholder input taken into consideration. Minimum standards will ensure consistency to meet public expectations and enhance public safety. Some stakeholders also suggested that a central regulating body could set standards and policies for PSAPs. One stakeholder suggested Emergency Management BC would be the ideal body for setting standards and policies.

It was noted that standards should include the equipment and infrastructure required for PSAPs to operate. Some stakeholders noted that despite established standards, there should be flexibility to address local needs and differences between urban and rural areas (i.e., minimum standards may not apply to remote areas of the province).

Funding model

Some stakeholders noted that the funding model in a consolidated system must be seen as equitable to avoid any perceptions of inequity, particularly between urban and rural jurisdictions. Local governments should have some degree of control in the funding model. Some stakeholders also mentioned their jurisdictions would like to have flexibility in selecting the services they will be paying for. Additionally, the administration of funding should be conducted by an existing group, and not through the creation of a new organization. An overall principle of the funding model was identified as transparency in how funds are collected and distributed.

E-COMM

A number of stakeholders noted that they were already in a contract, or moving towards a contract, with E-COMM (Emergency Communications for BC Inc). These stakeholders were comfortable with this arrangement and believed that it would retain the benefits of stand-alone communication centres.

Call Answer Levy (CAL) on Wireless Devices

CAL administration

The majority of stakeholders support a provincial CAL, particularly given the decline in landline use and revenue and the increase in 911 calls from cell phones. Stakeholders also noted that the most efficient and

effective process for administering the CAL would be through the provincial government, with revenue distributed equitably to local governments.

Devices to be covered by the CAL

A number of stakeholders felt the CAL should cover all devices capable of connecting to 911 - wireless, landlines, and future technologies. It was felt this would create more of a user-pay environment, which fairly allocates the cost across all users.

CAL model

Stakeholders noted that BC should model the new levy after CALs already in place in other provinces. Currently wireless service providers collect 911 fees province-wide from their subscribers on behalf of the provincial governments that have a CAL. It was noted that wireless service providers should be allowed to keep an administration fee, while others mentioned that the amount of the administration fee should be negotiated to a lower rate.

CAL scope

Stakeholders noted that the CAL should fund more services than just 911 PSAP. Some stakeholders mentioned only the operations of emergency communications centres, not first responder costs, should be funded using CAL. Others stated that the use of the CAL funds should be the decision of each PSAP.

Potential services identified which could be included within the funding allocation included radio networks, civic addresses, Secondary Safety Answering Point enhancements, or GIS mapping & technology. Some stakeholders noted human resources were one component which should not be funded through the CAL.

Stakeholders in northern regions of the province noted that CAL revenue would address the present, longstanding concern over the absence of any 911 service. First Nations stakeholders also noted the issue of lack of 911 service on some First Nations territories.

Other Comments

One written submission expressed concern with the process of the discussion paper and the deadline for submitting feedback, and requested clarification on whether the Province's proposal is to assume responsibility for 911 PSAP services. In response to these concerns, the Ministry clarified that the timelines were set to assist in preparations for the June 1, 2015, Emergency Communications Forum and that submissions were accepted after the deadline. It was also clarified that it is not the intention of the Ministry of Justice to assume the responsibility from local government for the provision of emergency communications services in British Columbia.

Thank you to all the stakeholders who participated in the consultation. The feedback is being considered as part of the analysis of the Emergency Communications Strategic Vision, and will help to inform next steps.