

Frequently Asked Questions on Measure 34-243 Communications System Bond Measure

Q: What is the emergency communications system?

A: The emergency communications system is part of an integrated and comprehensive network of first responder agencies dedicated to the safety and health of the community. The emergency response network is organized and structured for timely response to any manner of emergencies or disasters and includes a wide range of capabilities of law enforcement, fire, ambulance and public works. The emergency communications system is the backbone of this critical network.

The emergency communications system is comprised of radio equipment, data systems, towers and buildings, radios, fire station alerting systems and other emergency communication technology. The system allows for:

- Rapid aid and assistance to the public 24 hours a day, 365 days a year
- Critical communications to occur between
 - 9-1-1 dispatchers and first responders (fire, police and ambulance) and
 - First responders, once they arrive on scene, to coordinate, request backup and get aid to victims.

Q: Why does the emergency communications system need to be updated?

A: Three key factors are prompting the need for system and facilities upgrades:

- Changes in emergency communications technology – The current system is aging and reaching the end of its serviceable life. The system has worked for decades, but now manufacturers no longer make key parts because they have transitioned to newer technology; finding quality used parts for the current system has become increasingly difficult.
- A growing demand for emergency services – Population and emergency call volume are anticipated to increase over the coming decades. Updated equipment and room for expanded facilities would enable the 911 dispatch center to remain effective.
- A need to improve reliability during major disasters – The emergency communications system is designed, built and maintained to a much higher standard than consumer telecommunications. For example, this system must

continue to work reliably even when a storm, earthquake or other major emergency causes landline or cell phone networks to overload or fail. Updating equipment and strengthening facilities would improve the reliability of the system during severe weather, major earthquakes and other hazards.

Q: How much would the system transition and facilities improvements cost using bond funding?

A: The proposal would raise an estimated \$77 million for capital improvements, equipment upgrades, and the replacement of aging, obsolete analog radios currently used by first responders countywide. These funds would be generated through the County's issuance of general obligation bonds that are expected to be paid over less than 21 years.

Q: How much would this measure cost property tax payers?

A: The projected levy rate is not expected to exceed 8cents per \$1,000 of assessed value. The actual rate may vary depending on changes in bond interest rates and assessed values. This rate would be levied over less than 21 years. In other words, it is possible for this levy to end sooner than planned, once all the bonds have been repaid. A typical homeowner would pay about \$20 in 2016. This assumes an average assessed value (not market value) of \$255,408.

Q: Who uses the emergency communications system?

A: The system is used by every city police department, the County Sheriff's Office, all fire and rescue responders and all emergency medical and ambulance service providers countywide. These first-responding agencies and jurisdictions include:

- Banks Fire District No. 13
- City of Banks
- City of Beaverton
- City of Cornelius
- City of Durham
- City of Forest Grove
- City of Gaston
- City of Hillsboro
- City of North Plains
- City of Sherwood

- City of Tigard
- City of Tualatin
- Cornelius Fire Department
- Forest Grove Fire & Rescue
- Gaston Rural Fire District
- King City
- Tualatin Valley Fire & Rescue
- Washington County
- Washington County Fire District
No. 2

There are also several partner agencies that rely on the system to communicate with first responders as incidents occur or as situations develop. These additional agencies include:

- Hospitals
- Life Flight Network (air ambulances)
- MetroWest Ambulance
- Some public schools
- Public works departments and other public agencies

The ultimate benefactor is the public, who can confidently rely on the emergency response system in Washington County.

Q: Who runs the 9-1-1 dispatch center?

A: The 9-1-1 dispatch center is run by the Washington County Consolidated Communications Agency (WCCCA). WCCCA was established in 1985 to provide 9-1-1 call-taking service and public safety communications for police, fire and emergency medical personnel dispatched from Washington County agencies and jurisdictions. When a person calls 9-1-1 anywhere in Washington County, WCCCA dispatches police, fire and/or emergency medical assistance to the scene.

Q: How is the 9-1-1 system funded? Can 9-1-1 phone subscriber taxes pay for transitioning the emergency communications system to current technology?

A: The operations of the 9-1-1 dispatch center are funded by a combination of member user fees (cities, county and fire districts), state 9-1-1 telephone subscriber tax receipts and non-member fees (schools, ambulance providers, etc.). Major capital projects, such as expanded facilities and major equipment replacement for the emergency communications system have been historically funded by a combination property tax levies approved by the voters. The 9-1-1 phone subscriber taxes, which are distributed by the state, cover the costs of maintaining and updating the 9-1-1 telephone system infrastructure for 9-1-1 centers throughout Oregon. The telephone system is separate from the towers, radios and other equipment composing the emergency communications system.

Q: How many calls for service does WCCCA receive every year?

A: Our 9-1-1 dispatch center (WCCCA) answered over 505,000 phone calls in 2015 – 160,000 of which were 9-1-1 calls. Our dispatch center also processed almost 530,000 police and fire incidents events in 2015 as well, which include self-initiated activity by our police and fire departments. In each of those 530,000 incidents, the emergency communications system was used to coordinate the response between dispatch and the responding agencies, request back up and/or get additional aid to victims.

Q: What is the operating budget for WCCCA?

A: The day-to-day operating budget for WCCCA is available on the WCCCA website under “Departments” and “Finance and Administration.” The operations of the 9-1-1 dispatch center are funded by a combination of member user fees (cities, county and fire districts), state 9-1-1 telephone subscriber tax receipts and non-member fees (schools, ambulance providers, etc.). If passed by the voters, the Emergency Communications Bond Measure would authorize capital expenditures – not WCCCA’s daily operations – that would transition the communications system to current technology. More information about WCCCA can be found at wcca.com or by calling 503-690-4911.

Q: How was the current emergency communications system paid for? What did the 1990 measure do?

A: Washington County voters approved a three-year “serial levy” in 1990 with an estimated tax rate of 45 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value. The serial levy, which

passed with 60 percent voting “yes,” authorized the County to raise \$16.6 million to pay for analog radios and other emergency communications equipment, services and facilities. This equipment was purchased and installed 25 years ago, but now manufacturers no longer make key parts because they have transitioned to newer technology.

Q: Why can't the existing system continue to function without being replaced?

A: The current system is aging and reaching the end of its serviceable life. While the system has worked for decades, manufacturers no longer make key parts because they have transitioned to newer technology and finding quality used parts for the current system has become increasingly difficult. Migrating to newer technology is necessary to make sure the system will continue to function and allow for interoperability in the future.

Q: Why can't the state or federal governments pay for replacing the emergency communications system?

A: The state and federal governments offer only limited technical and financial resources to assist local governments with emergency communications system upgrades. Local jurisdictions have the responsibility to operate and maintain the emergency communications systems that serve local police, fire and emergency medical agencies. Although state and federal grant funds have helped purchase select, but limited equipment, there is no state or federal program focused on funding the complex transition of local 9-1-1 emergency communications systems to current technology.

Q: What are the other funding options for transitioning the emergency communications system to current technology?

A: Due to the large public investment required to upgrade emergency communications systems, a number of financing methods have been used in the past, including: 1) general obligation bonds (voter approval required); 2) serial levies (voter approval required); 3) conventional loan with annual debt service paid by system users; and 4) capital replacement funds collected and set aside from system users over a period of years. For this project, Washington County's 19 member user agencies determined that general obligation bonds were the most appropriate

financing mechanism given the cost, timing and urgency of the required system upgrade.

Q: What happens if voters do not pass this measure at the election on May 17, 2016?

A: If voters do not approve the bond measure in May, the emergency communications system will not be replaced and upgraded in a timely manner and will become increasingly susceptible to unrepairable equipment or component failure, which would have an impact on emergency response.

If this occurs, the 19 member agencies would need to explore other options for funding the necessary transition to current technology. These other options would take more time and may place the financial burden of system replacement on the individual member agencies, which could lead to further delays, increased costs and operational complexity.

Q: If this bond measure is passed by voters, when would property owners need to make their first payment? When would they need to make the last payment?

A: If this bond measure is approved, taxpayers would see the new levy on their property tax statement beginning in October 2016. The last levy payment would be no later than October 2037. It is possible for this levy to end sooner than planned, once all the bonds have been repaid.

Q: Why might the levy rate vary year to year?

A: This measure would authorize the County to issue general obligation bonds for \$77 million in capital costs. The projected levy rate to pay for this amount of bond funding is not expected to exceed 8 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value. The actual rate may vary depending on changes in bond interest rates and assessed values in Washington County. Given potential changes in bond interest rates and assessed values, it is possible that the bonds could be paid sooner than estimated.

Q: Would a transition to current emergency communications technology allow the public to use social media or texting to request

help from first responders?

A: Bond funding that would pay for the transition to current emergency communications system technology would be separate from “text-to-9-1-1” or other initiatives that would allow the public to seek help through the 9-1-1 dispatch center using Internet-based tools. Nevertheless, planning for text-to-9-1-1 capability is underway and may become an option for the public in Washington County by early 2017.

Whenever text-to-9-1-1 or other “next generation” communications tools *do* become available, first-responding agencies and the 9-1-1 dispatch center would still rely on the radio equipment, data systems, towers and other aspects of the emergency communications system to coordinate and get aid to victims as quickly as possible. Transitioning the radio equipment and related components of the communications system to current technology is the focus of this Bond Measure.

Q: What would the different spending categories be for the \$77 million in bond funding?

A: The bond funds would be used in these categories:

- **\$37.9 million for radio infrastructure** Most of the funds would be used to replace and upgrade current radio and communications equipment. (49%)
- **\$12.2 million for radios for first responders** The next-largest amount of funding would pay for the replacement of approximately 3,000 analog radios used by first-responding agencies. (16%)
- **\$10.0 million for earthquake retrofit & other building improvements** The third-largest portion of funding would pay for seismic upgrading and other facilities costs with the goal of keeping the 9-1-1 dispatch center effective and operational during major emergencies and as the county population grows. (13%)
- **\$4.1 million for communication system refresh/upgrade** Component replacement and software upgrades to extend the system’s life over a 20-year period (5%)
- **\$1.9 million for radio console equipment for dispatchers** Equipment used directly by 9-1-1 staff to receive, dispatch and monitor calls for service (3%)
- **\$1.8 million for fire station alerting** This category would enable local fire stations to continue receiving alerts 24 hours a day about fire and rescue incidents sent by 9-1-1 dispatch (2%)

- **\$1.9 million for miscellaneous expenses** About \$2 million would be used over 21 years for miscellaneous purposes such as bond issuance, legal and other costs. (3%)
- **\$7.2 million contingency** Large capital projects typically reserve a portion of anticipated revenue in case of unexpected changes in construction costs, such as inflation. (9%)

Q: How long will it take to get this system replaced?

A: If the bond measure is approved by voters, the transition to current technology would begin immediately and the project would be expected to conclude within three to five years.

Q: Would the new equipment and technology last as long as the existing technology has?

A: Although technology is constantly changing, it is anticipated that much of the equipment and technology funded through this Bond Measure would have a serviceable life of at least 10 to 20 years. During this time, the 9-1-1 dispatch center and first-responding agencies would plan and budget for component replacements and other routine maintenance to extend the life of the system.

Towers and Facilities

Were the Bond Measure to pass, the useful life of these structures and equipment is estimated to be greater than 20 years with proper preventative maintenance.

First-responder Radios

The estimated 3,000 radios for first-responding agencies would have a serviceable life of 10 to 15 years. First-responding agencies would be responsible for saving funds until then to purchase replacement radios as they see fit.

Radio Infrastructure

Were the Bond Measure to pass, a portion of the bond funding would be set aside to pay for component replacement and software upgrades to extend the system's life over a 20-year period. WCCCA plans to evaluate the viability of the new technology roughly 10 years after it is installed. A decision would be made at that point about what upgrades might be required over the next 10 years.

Microwave Equipment and Other Elements

These aspects of the new system would have an approximate life of 10 years. WCCCA would create replacement funds to accumulate the resources needed to purchase and install new equipment if needed at that time.

Q: What will WCCCA do with the old equipment?

A: Were the Bond Measure to pass and the transition to current technology to begin, most of the displaced equipment would go into surplus and be scrapped. Most third-party equipment providers have said they consider much of the existing equipment composing Washington County's emergency communications system to be too old for resale.

Q: Where will the additional towers be built? How many will there be? Will they be eye sores?

A: This transition to digital equipment must occur in the near term because the existing communications system is aging and reaching the end of its serviceable life. To ensure effectiveness of the new system, roughly eight to nine additional towers will be required in select locations, but these new tower sites have yet to be finalized. In most cases, tower sites will be in remote areas of the county. Washington County and WCCCA will comply with all land use requirements for minimizing the visibility of any new towers in each jurisdiction where one is sited. Strategies include using appropriate colors and design to blend the towers into the surrounding landscape as much as possible.

Q: Would the additional towers expand coverage across the county?

A: The general focus of this project is to maintain existing radio coverage countywide. Additional towers are required to maintain similar digital radio coverage to what the current analog system provides. However, the additional towers will enhance coverage in a number of select areas in addition to compensating for the different coverage provided by the two technologies. If current radio capabilities are to be maintained, this transition to digital equipment must occur in the near term because the existing system is aging and reaching the end of its serviceable life. Without this transition, Washington County's communications system will not be

interoperable with adjacent counties, state agencies or federal agencies in the near future.

Q: How would the 9-1-1 center expand if this measure were to pass?

A: Because population and emergency call volume are anticipated to increase over the coming decades, the Bond Measure would help fund updated equipment and room for expanded facilities at the 9-1-1 center. Options include:

- retrofitting and equipping the 9-1-1 center's current facility in the Tanasbourne area,
- retrofitting and equipping an existing public facility elsewhere in the county,
- building a new facility on vacant land or
- some combination of these options.

Whatever option is chosen, a key objective for the project would include improving the reliability of the emergency communications system during severe weather, major earthquakes and other hazards.

Q: How can taxpayers be assured that bond funds are not wasted?

A: Bond funds for the project would be restricted to only those areas of spending authorized by the voters. Use of funds would be subject to the restrictions, oversight and auditing requirements outlined in state law and local fiscal policies. This accountability includes the work of independent financial auditors and oversight by citizens appointed to local budget and auditing committees. Bond expenditures would also be monitored and reviewed by Washington County, WCCCA and WCCCA user members.

Q: Were the Bond Measure to pass, how would costs be controlled?

A: Washington County and WCCCA will work together to ensure careful allocation and spending of bond proceeds. By law, bond funds would be restricted to only those areas of spending authorized by the voters. National standards and specifications for current emergency communications technology already exist for the equipment to be purchased, so manufacturers and vendors would be required to meet these established standards. State law, rules and local policies would govern the contracting and purchasing of this equipment as well as any facility improvements or construction.

Q: How would this project relate to the Oregon Wireless Interoperability Network (OWIN) or the Revised State Radio Project (RSRP)?

A: The State of Oregon began a process in 2005 to transition the statewide communications system to current technology for the Oregon State Police and the Oregon Department of Transportation. The process began as the Oregon Wireless Interoperability Network (OWIN) but its scope and funding were reduced and the project was renamed in 2011 as the Revised State Radio Project (RSRP). This state-level project was supported through funds appropriated by the Oregon State Legislature (including state bonds and highway revenue) and is approaching full implementation with a projected end point in 2017.

The Washington County project to transition the local emergency communications system is separate from the State of Oregon's transition effort. This is because local jurisdictions are responsible for operating and maintaining emergency communications systems serving local police, fire and emergency medical agencies. There is no state or federal program focused on the transition of local 9-1-1 emergency communications systems to current technology. That said, the two systems would function on the same interoperable digital platform once both transition projects are complete.

Q: How is the Washington County bond measure related to the Clackamas County bond measure?

A: Both counties are facing the similar issue of having an emergency communications system that has reached the end of its serviceable life. The Washington County 9-1-1 dispatch center (WCCCA) has a cooperative arrangement with the Clackamas County 9-1-1 dispatch center (C-COM/C800 Group) to share key components of the Clackamas County emergency communications system. For this reason, it is beneficial to residents of both counties to coordinate the transitions to current technology. To achieve this goal, Clackamas County is considering a bond measure with an estimated rate of 10 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value over a 15 year period.

The Washington County and Clackamas County bond measures are timed to coordinate upgrades in a manner that optimizes system efficiency and effectiveness.

Q: What happens if voters pass a measure in one county but not in the other county?

A: If either county bond measure fails, the county without voter authorization for issuing general obligation bonds would need to explore other financing options for moving the project forward. The county that gains voter approval would be able to proceed immediately with plans to transition their emergency communications system to current technology.

Q: What other jurisdictions have transitioned to current technology for their emergency communications systems?

A: Other nearby jurisdictions that have already made the transition to current technology for their emergency communications systems include:

- City of Portland (bonds)
- Clark Regional Emergency Services Agency (CRESA) in Washington State (user-agency capital replacement fund)
- Lane County (bonds)

Clackamas County is currently requesting voter consideration for bonds that would pay for a similar system transition.