

NEWS

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SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY

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Board supports upgraded public safety radio system

SAN BERNARDINO – Buying some replacement parts on eBay and raiding refuse piles for others, San Bernardino County definitely got its money's worth out of its woefully obsolete, decades-old 800 MHz public safety radio system.

The Board of Supervisors on Tuesday acted to update the system, which serves all police and firefighting agencies in America's largest county, into a state-of-the-art Motorola Project 25 communications system compatible with systems in all neighboring counties and states as well as military bases within the county. The system will also allow the county and its 24 cities and towns to use their existing radios, saving millions in scarce local taxpayer dollars.

"The Board has made a significant investment in the safety of our citizens and the men and women in uniform who protect us," said Board of Supervisors Chair Janice Rutherford. "And we are doing this without incurring costly debt."

The upgrade of the county's public safety radio communication and microwave data transport systems will provide public safety personnel with a new stable and reliable digital communications system supported by its manufacturers. The system will provide improved voice clarity and signal strength, enhanced security features, and the ability to roam without having to manually change radio modes to find the strongest signal.

The project fulfills goals and objectives established by the Board by improving County government operations, operating in a fiscally responsible and business-like manner, and maintaining public safety.

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The current system has long been a headache for public safety agencies and the technicians in charge of keeping it up and running. It is no longer supported by its manufacturer, and replacement parts have been difficult to find and will soon be non-existent. County technicians have had to find parts on eBay and similar websites and have even collected parts from agencies disposing of their old systems. The system is so old that the people who know how to fix it are approaching retirement age.

Periodic failures occur, and at some point the system will completely and permanently stop working.

"These systems are expensive, so in a sense, we are pleased we have been able to make it last this long," Chair Rutherford said. "However, not upgrading our communications infrastructure has become a gamble with public safety that we cannot afford."

Two years ago, the Board began setting aside \$20 million a year to pay for the upgraded system. Continuing this through June 2019 will fully cover the \$158.2 million project without incurring the costly debt government agencies often use to fund investments of this size.

The Board's decision Tuesday also leverages a \$40 million investment the County recently made in Motorola Project 25 portable radio and infrastructure equipment. Also, by acting when it did, the Board took advantage of an \$18.5 million discount that would have expired on January 1.