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Pennsylvania Regions Interconnect to Enhance Emergency Communications

Mission Critical Partners lends subject matter expertise to fiber-optic network implementation that supports several data-sharing initiatives

STATE COLLEGE, Pa., November 9, 2020 — An initiative to interconnect three Pennsylvania regions via a fiber-optic communications network to improve emergency response was completed at the end of October. The project was supported by Mission Critical Partners (MCP), which provides consulting services and solutions that support mission-critical communications, specializing in networks, data integration and cybersecurity.

The three regions and respective counties that collaborated on this project are as follows:

- Region 13—Allegheny, Armstrong, Butler, Beaver, Cambria, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Lawrence, Mercer, Somerset, Venango, Washington and Westmoreland (plus the city of Pittsburgh)
- Southern Alleghenies 911 Cooperative—Bedford, Blair, Cambria, Centre, Huntingdon, Fulton and Somerset
- Northern Tier—Cameron, Clarion, Clearfield, Crawford, Elk, Erie, Jefferson, Forest, McKean and Warren

The overarching goal of this project—which was funded through the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) Statewide Interconnectivity Funding Grant Program—was to enable the regions to more easily transition to Next Generation 911 (NG911) service when the time is right for doing so, by enhancing the ability of each entity to share resources, capabilities and costs. The interconnection aspect of the project was completed at the end of October when the Northern Tier counties were connected to the other two regions, which have been sharing information since the beginning of the year.

The multi-region interconnection will enable the transfer of misdirected emergency calls to the appropriate 911 center in a more seamless manner than before. It also will enable the centers to share critical data to enhance situational awareness, and to share 911-related technology, which will result in significant time savings during emergencies, as well as cost savings for all member counties. It also will enable a 911 center to transfer its operations seamlessly to another center when a disaster has rendered the first center inoperable, inaccessible or uninhabitable.

“Data integration’ has become a buzzword within the public safety community,” said Joel Landis, Somerset’s director of emergency services. “This project will enable all of the entities across all three regions to exchange and leverage data in new and exciting ways.”



Somerset County, working with MCP, led the effort to develop technical specifications and a request for proposals (RFP) document that would guide the procurement process. Fiber was selected as the interconnection medium because it offers numerous benefits, as follows:

- Elimination of single points of failure
- Redundancy and resiliency if a fiber cut occurs—the geo-diverse nature of the network enables traffic to simply be rerouted over unaffected paths; in addition, fiber generally is impervious to weather conditions
- Ability to transfer all 911 call information automatically—most notably location data—simply by clicking on an icon
- Ability to share resources and technology, such as call-handling and CAD systems, which will make operations more efficient and will save considerable money.

“We helped the regions choose a vendor that could help the counties build a diverse fiber network. Fiber itself isn’t always diverse,” said Kevin Murray, MCP’s chairman and chief executive officer. “Fiber networks also provide the medium for long-term growth of network capacity, far exceeding microwave network capacity.”

Murray added that the regional fiber interconnection provides the foundation for developing additional opportunities for data/information sharing and 911 center resiliency, while also creating potential for future cost-sharing opportunities for systems and operations.

Plans exist to leverage the fiber infrastructure to enable the participating entities to interconnect other regional emergency services Internet Protocol networks (ESInets). In an NG911 environment, ESInets are used to deliver emergency calls to compliant 911 centers. Longer term, the fiber infrastructure will enable the three regions to interconnect to a statewide ESInet, when one comes to fruition.

About Mission Critical Partners (MCP)

Mission Critical Partners (MCP) is an independent IT and network support services firm specializing in mission-critical infrastructure. MCP helps clients enhance and evolve their public safety systems and operations through our extensive experience, knowledge and resources. By providing insight and support every step of the way, our clients are able to transform their mission-critical operations, maximizing the value of their investments and ensuring optimal performance and success. Additional information and career opportunities are available at www.MissionCriticalPartners.com.

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