ARMER Task Force October Meeting Agenda Notes

1. MEETING DETAILS

Date: 10-28-26

Time: 1:00–4:00 p.m.

Format: Hybrid via Teams

Location: State Emergency Operations Center, 3925 Pheasant Ridge Drive NE, Blaine, MN 55449

Time	Agenda Item
1:00-1:05	**Welcome**
1:05-1:40	**SECB Duties, Powers, and Structure**
1:40-2:15	**ARMER Horizon Workgroup Presentation**
2:15 – 2:25	**Break**
2:25-2:55	**ARMER System Comprehensive Funding Plan**
2:55-3:25	**ARMER Budgetary Needs & Funding Options**
3:25-3:30	**Closing/Adjourn**

Note: These notes are intended to summarize the discussion and decisions from the meeting. To request a correction or clarification, please contact **ARMERTaskForce@theimprovegroup.com**

A recording of the meeting can be found here: **ARMER Task Force Meeting - October 28th-20261028_130242-Meeting Recording.mp4**

2. ATTENDANCE

Task Force Members Present

- Shane Chatleain, Office of Statewide Radio Communications, Minnesota Department of Transportation
- Brent Christensen, Minnesota Telecom Alliance
- T. John Cunningham, Minnesota Department of Public Safety
- Kristine V. Elwood, Minnesota Department of Transportation
- Mike Gamache, Anoka County
- Dona Greiner, Stevens County
- John Jasinski, Minnesota Senate
- Micah Myers, City of St. Cloud
- Elliott Payne, Minneapolis City Council

- Jake Lestock, CTIA
- Jonathan Rasch, Minnesota State Fire Chiefs Association
- Jill Rohret, Metropolitan Emergency Services Board
- Eamonn Schmitz, Statewide Emergency Communications Board
- Nate Smolinski, Minnesota Homeland Security and Emergency Management
- Terry Stier, Minnesota House of Representatives
- Jake Thompson, Hennepin County
- Eric Wallen, Lyon County Sheriff's Office
- Melissa Wolf, Minnesota Cable Communications Association

Task Force Member Absent

- John Huot, Minnesota House of Representatives
- Ron Latz, Minnesota Senate
- Bruce Lawrence, Pennington County
- Sara Miller, Gibbon Police Department

3. SECB DUTIES, POWERS, & STRUCTURE

Task Force member Eamonn Schmitz, Executive Director of the Statewide Emergency Communications Board (SECB) described the SECB's duties, powers, and structure. Mr. Schmitz summarized the history of public safety radio systems nationally and the governance of Minnesota's SECB.

The SECB's statutory duties, specifically related to ARMER, include the following (see slides for complete details):

- Develop a project plan for a statewide trunked radio system (ARMER). ARMER completed in 2020. SECB produces the SCIP plan and works with MnDOT on funding and maintenance needs.
- Oversight over MnDOT's continued maintenance, DPS' contract with MnDOT.
- Approve plans for any local unit of government receiving funds for integration with ARMER.
- Coordinate the statewide, shared, radio and communications system project plan with local and regional plans and modify the state plan as necessary.
- Define the backbone of the system and geographic scope, as well as system performance, in order to maximize interoperability. Standards set by the Land Mobile Radio (LMR) Committee as recommendations to Board. Interoperability Committee also advises the Board.
- Determine how capital and operating costs of the system will be allocated. Occurs case-by-case through the LMR Committee, ratified or amended by Board.
- Coordinate eligibility for system improvements.
- Establish and enforce performance and technical standards.
- Establish and enforce protocols for the system to facilitate uniformity.
- Coordinate integration with regions, states, federal entities, and Canada.

- Allocate funds to encourage participation.
- Facilitate the formation of regional advisory committees and cooperate with and assist those regional boards in implementing their plans and with subsequent development.
- Establish topical advisory committees.
- Promote coordination and cooperation among local, state, federal and tribal public safety agencies to address communications interoperability.

Mr. Schmitz described the governance structure of the SECB as a "three-legged stool":

- SECB sets policy
- DPS implements and contracts with MnDOT
- MnDOT owns and maintains the backbone infrastructure

The SECB has 21 voting members, about 150 volunteer members, and 1 full-time employee. It operates on a $1 million annual appropriation from the 911 fund, which includes $575,000 in grants to support regional governance support/administration, training and exercises, and equipment. See **slides 4-37** for more details about the SECB.

4. ARMER HORIZON WORKGROUP PRESENTATION

Task Force member Nate Smolinski (DPS) presented the draft findings report from the Horizon Workgroup. The Horizon workgroup is a subcommittee of the SECB's LMR Committee tasked with drafting what the future ARMER should look like. This workgroup evaluated options on six criteria:

- Cost
- Regional needs. Accounting for differences in need between metro and greater MN or county differences.
- Long-term sustainment. Considering the future state of technologies like satellite, LTE, etc.
- Adoption elsewhere. Considering whether these technologies are being used elsewhere and what can be learned from that.
- Security effects
- Total financial impact

The Horizon workgroup recommends a modernization approach that integrates LMR, LTE, and Wi-Fi with strong cybersecurity. See the **2026 Horizon Report** for more details on the recommendation.

The task force discussed the report recommendations, including considerations that system modernization will may result in a cost to local users. For example, many radios do not have Wi-Fi capability, and a decision to move in a modernized direction may be seen by local agencies as an unfunded mandate. Additional discussions and considerations will be needed to explore backwards compatibility, scheduling, and additional funding.

5. ARMER SYSTEM COMPREHENSIVE FUNDING PLAN

Task Force member Shane Chatleain (MnDOT) presented the ARMER System Comprehensive Funding Plan, which covers the unfunded need to sustain the current ARMER backbone at today's service level through 2030. MnDOT's revenue comes from four sources:

- 911 Special Revenue Account
- Trunk Highway Fund
- Local system owner billing
- Tower lease receipts

MnDOT's funding of the ARMER backbone falls into three primary areas:

- System Upgrade Agreement (SUA): Annual vendor support (provided by Motorola from 2026-2030) and vendor provided system upgrades.
- Capital Asset Replacement: Long-term life cycle infrastructure needs, including major investments in towers, shelters, generators, microwave transport equipment, power systems, cybersecurity, and other backbone components.
- Operations and maintenance: Stable operating and maintenance funding for ARMER backbone support and required staffing.

The funding plan reports an unfunded need of about $10.5 million in 2026, increasing to about $14 million in 2030. See the **MnDOT ARMER System Comprehensive Funding Plan report** for more details.

The task force discussed the options for funding the ARMER backbone, and local enhancements Some members raised 911 fees as an option. Some members raised concerns about increasing 911 fees given federal restrictions on raising these fees and using them to pay for ARMER, other earmarked priorities for 911 funds, and pointed out that an unfunded gap would still remain. Members in support of funding the ARMER backbone and local enhancements from state appropriations said that State agencies use ARMER (not just local law enforcement and public safety agencies) and statewide coordination is important for continued interoperability. Members in support of funding the ARMER backbone and local enhancements through additional, localized means mentioned the robust subscriber base and possibility of going to private, non-public safety subscribers to support future funding. Top considerations for funding among task force members included:

- Raising 911 fees (see considerations above)
- Seeking pockets of funding elsewhere (e.g., proceeds from abandoned and stolen property)
- Prioritizing the top investment areas the Task Force wants to fund, acknowledging that it will be challenging to find complete funding for ARMER backbone and additional modernization costs

6. ARMER BUDGETARY NEEDS & FUNDING OPTIONS

Task Force Chair Rep. Terry Stier facilitated discussion about whether ARMER costs should be fully state-funded or shared with locals. The Task Force referenced the **ARMER Horizon State-Local Assets document** for areas of interest and potential challenges regarding prospective state ownership of locally owned ARMER system assets and infrastructure.

Task Force members asked for a more complete cost estimate that includes the ARMER backbone, local enhancements, and PSAP upgrades. Some members noted this would be difficult with the timing of Sherriff elections and transitions. Some members asked for clarification on whether the Task Force was responsible for primarily identifying funding, or if they were also responsible for identifying rules/procedures attached to funding (e.g., grants to local agencies to upgrade equipment).

7. NEXT STEPS AND CLOSING

Next meetings:

- **Meeting 6:** Wednesday, November 18, 2026
  - Time: 9:00am-3:00pm
  - Format: In-person preferred (hybrid setup will be available)
  - In-person location: MnDOT Training & Conference Center, 1900 County Rd I, Shoreview
- **Meeting 7:** Wednesday, December 16, 2026
  - Time: 1:00pm-4:00pm
  - Format: Hybrid
  - In-person location: TBD
- **Meeting 8:** Wednesday, January 27, 2027
  - Time: 1:00pm-3:00pm
  - Format: Hybrid
  - In-person location TBD