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NEWS RELEASE

February 25, 2008

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City, county working to enhance medical, police and fire emergency responses

Agencies seeking federal grant for data communications system

Ask any emergency first responder in Taney County what one of his or her biggest need is, and the answer will most likely be a communications network that links every fire, law enforcement and ambulance department in the county.

That communication is available, and emergency responder agencies in Taney County have joined forces to make it a reality here. The new system consists of in-car digital video cameras and mobile computer technology. The price tag for this state-of-the-art communication technology comes to \$2.8 million. However, total federal funding is available.

Representatives from the Taney County Sheriff's Office and police departments from Branson, Hollister, Forsyth and Rockaway Beach have formed the White River Emergency Communications Project to seek the federal dollars. The Project has already contacted the congressional offices of Representatives Roy Blunt and Jo Ann Emerson to co-sponsor the funding.

The Taney County Commission and mayors of the cities in the Project have also sent letters of support for the grant.

The \$2.8 million would be for three years, which local officials feel would get the communication system up and running effectively. After the third year, the only costs would be maintenance of the system, and officials believe the local agencies could afford that.

"After thorough research and evaluation of our current law enforcement operational needs, we have determined that we will need to equip 125 emergency vehicles with mobile data terminals (MDT's) to effectively enhance public safety in all of our communities," said Taney County Sheriff Jimmy Russell.

Currently, all communications among first responders are voice only. But with mobile data computers in emergency vehicles, so much more can be accessed by officers in the field like mug

shots, traffic records, floor plans of buildings and even hazardous material data in a timely manner. Cameras in police vehicles would let dispatchers monitor officers making stops and calls as they happen.

“This network system has the ability to keep officers on the streets, making them more available to the community, and it minimizes response times,” said Sgt. Sean Barnwell of the Branson Police Department. “It’s imperative to give our officers every advantage possible in the war on crime.”

Mobile computer technology would allow paramedics to send data to hospitals before arriving with a patient. In the future, it would be possible to have cameras in the ambulances where doctors could observe the paramedic’s treatment to the patient.

GIS mapping would allow officers and firemen to know the layout of an emergency scene before they arrive, allowing them to plan their responses accordingly.

The county already has three 9-1-1 dispatch centers – Taney County Sheriff, Branson Police and Taney County Ambulance -- that would coordinate the dissemination of data to first responders in the field. The dispatch centers would also have the capability to see, on a computer map, the locations of first responders in the county in real time.

“The direct results of these capabilities are dramatic enhancements in community and officer safety,” said Taney County Presiding Commissioner Chuck Pennel.

Recently, city and county officials as well as law enforcement, fire and ambulance personnel traveled to Jasper County, Missouri, to see a similar data system funded by grant money.

“I was totally impressed with the mobile data system in Jasper County, and hope we can establish a comparable system in Taney County that would benefit our citizens, visitors and officers,” said Pennel.



Mobile data terminals, like this one in the Jasper County Sheriff’s Department, lets officers receive and send data.



The Jasper County 9-1-1 dispatch center allows dispatchers to see locations of first responders. Taney County is seeking a similar data system.