

Metro Region ARMER Standards

Section 3 – Metro 3.22.0 Use of Mobile/Portable Gateways to Connect to Fixed Network Interoperability Resources

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6-27-18

1. Purpose or Objective

Establish a policy and procedure for the use of mobile/portable audio gateway devices when interconnecting to ARMER conventional or trunked shared resources.

2. Operational Background

- Capabilities

There are several devices available for purchase that can interconnect to mobile and/or portable radios in any location. When these devices receive a transmission on one radio, they key the transmitter on the other radio and feed the audio from the receiving radio to the transmitting radio. The communications can go in both directions but only one at a time. Console patches are not considered as a mobile/portable gateway.

- Constraints

Unless used properly with knowledge of the networks being patched, these devices can be harmful to the normal operations of those networks. Their use can be particularly harmful to a simulcast digital trunked radio system, such as the ARMER system.

Mobile/portable gateways must be optimized in order to provide intelligible audio through the patch. Non-optimized gateway connections often cause message truncation (loss of words at the beginning or end of a transmission), audio holes in the middle of messages, audio level problems (too loud or quiet), audio distortion, excessive end of message hang times resulting in “bonks” or call rejects, and other problems.

If multiple connections are established to the same resources on different gateways (one of which may be a console patch), an audio loop will occur, locking up all channels/talkgroups in the patch causing constant noise which cannot be talked over by a user.

Connecting multiple patches in a “daisy chain” fashion causes excessive key-up delays, message truncation and most commonly intelligibility problems due to multiple audio processing conversions of digital to analog/receiver to transmitter, etc.

3. Operational Context

Patching disparate radio systems is essential to facilitate interoperability between users that do not have compatible radio equipment. The preferred method of patching is currently the use of a fixed gateway (dispatch console) which is hardwired to the radio infrastructure needing to be patched. Such patches are commonly established between ARMER trunked talkgroups and the metro region ARMER conventional interoperability system (VMED28, VLAW31, etc). This method of patching is effective when all end users are within the coverage range of the radio infrastructures involved in the patch.

In some cases, an incident requires the interconnection of channels with no associated infrastructure interfaced with the fixed gateway system, or out of the coverage range of these channels. In these cases, the use of mobile/portable gateways is necessary.

4. Recommended Protocol/Standard

Because of the high potential for harmful interference and disruption of communications, no mobile/portable audio gateway device may be connected, attached or used on the metropolitan region of the ARMER system unless the patch is setup by a trained gateway operator and such use has the approval of a state recognized ICS Communications Unit Leader (COML) or Communications Unit Technician (COMT) under an approved ICS 205 Incident Communications Plan.

5. Recommended Procedure

An agency desiring to implement a mobile/portable audio gateway patch to a regional resource for a pre-planned event should prepare an Incident Communications Plan using an ICS 205 form indicating the resources to be patched. If the agency does not have a certified COML or COMT, it should request assistance from a certified COML from the subsystem owner it will be connecting to or from the MESB. The COML will be responsible to review the proposed patch to determine that it will not cause interference. The COML will also be responsible to notify the appropriate dispatch center responsible to update the status board application to indicate the resources are reserved for use.

An agency desiring to implement a mobile/portable audio gateway patch for an emergent incident should notify the dispatch center controlling the incident to inform them of the resources requested to be patched. The dispatch center will update the status board applications to indicate the patched resources are in use and patched. If the agency does not have a state recognized COML or COMT, it should request assistance from another state recognized COML and complete an ICS 205 as soon as possible for dissemination to the Incident Commander and the dispatch center controlling the incident. COML assistance may be provided remotely. If a state recognized COML is unavailable, the appropriate ARMER Subsystem administrator should be consulted prior to initiating the portable/mobile gateway patch.

The following guidelines should be followed when utilizing mobile/portable gateways:

- Mobile/portable gateway patches should only be setup by a trained gateway operator that is familiar with the equipment and the resources to be patched.
- Radio resources should only be contained in a single patch in a single mobile/portable gateway. "Daisy chaining" resources across multiple gateways, e.g. a talkgroup to a conventional channel in one gateway and the same conventional channel patched to a different talkgroup in a second gateway, should not be attempted due to poor performance.
- Radio ports should be configured for COR detect rather than VOX whenever possible to reduce the problem with loss of the first few syllables.
- Prior to establishing the patch, the gateway operator should make an announcement on the applicable resources that a patch is being set up.

- Upon connecting the patch, the gateway operator should test the patch end to end to verify acceptable performance.
- If performance is poor, the gateway operator will make any necessary adjustments to audio levels, delay timers, tone control, etc.
- The gateway operator will make an announcement that the patch is setup and ready for use.
- The gateway operator will monitor the performance of the patch while it is in use.
- Once the patch is no longer needed, the gateway operator will announce that the patch is being removed and will disconnect the patch.

6. Management

The MESB Radio Coordinator will maintain a list of state recognized COMLs and COMTs which may be consulted regarding the use of mobile/portable gateways. The Radio Technical Operations Committee (RTOC) will have the responsibility to investigate and resolve problems associated with the use of mobile/portable audio gateways.