
Government of the District of Columbia



Metropolitan Police Department

Testimony of
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Hearing on
“United States Capitol Police Radio Upgrades”

United States House of Representatives
Committee on House Administration
Subcommittee on Capitol Security
Honorable Michael Capuano, Chair

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Chairman Capuano, members of the Committee, staff and guests – thank you for the opportunity to present this statement on the need for upgrades to radios used by the United States Capitol Police. I believe that this upgrade is vital to the safety of those who work in and visit the US Capitol, and therefore is of interest to both the District of Columbia, and the entire nation.

The specific operational relationship between the Metropolitan Police Department and the US Capitol Police regarding voice communication has a long history of partnership. In 1992, our Department and the United States Capitol Police entered into a Memorandum of Understanding allowing for reciprocity in radio programming.

At the time, both agencies used an analog based system. Selected units with adjacent patrol areas were cross programmed allowing members to monitor and communicate on each agency's channels. However, the systems shared a common trait of analog systems with poor signal strength (especially in many large buildings), inherent noise and heavy static and the inability to communicate in the subway system.

In 2003, the District of Columbia built a Digital Trunked Radio Network for all city agencies. This replaced MPD's analog system and now provides redundant service within a 35 mile radius. A backup transmitter system uses microwave technology and can provide service within the general boundaries of the Beltway if needed.

Interoperability is one of the most important joint issues between local and federal partners. In September of 2006 a mandatory federal Tactical Interoperability Exercise was conducted by the Department of Homeland Security with National Capitol Region agencies. The NCR partners, including MPD and US Capitol Police, received one of the highest marks in the nation.

Our city's system can also be viewed as a regional system. Because of the digital platform, there is the ability to program access for additional users from partner agencies, both local and federal. However, agencies using an analog platform are at a disadvantage. They cannot be programmed to have direct connections to a digital system.

Any upgrade to the US Capitol Police radio system will have a direct, positive impact on MPD operations and city events. Our agencies are daily partners in maintaining general security, and handling events such as protests and large-scale events as National Special Security Events. With the Presidential Inauguration seven months away, to be followed by the State of the Union address, the need for improvement is paramount. It is very common for events to involve not only our two agencies but many other partners such as the US Park Police or the United States Secret Service.

Both our agencies are parties to the National Capital Region's Police Mutual Aid Operational Plan. An integral part of this agreement involves response and Unified Command when faced with Multi-Jurisdictional Responsibility, a common factor for law enforcement in the District. Voice interoperability is a key to achieving efficient operations and the spirit of this agreement. As we move toward a unified force in crime prevention and law enforcement within the National Capital Region, it has become more prudent now than ever before to effectively communicate with our law enforcement partners.

Although the incompatibility of our systems does not allow direct programming, interoperability is available through different methods: The Police Mutual Aid Radio System (PMARS) connects call centers, including the US Capitol Police. It is one of the oldest interoperability tools in the region. This program is administered through the Council of Governments. It allows 911 centers to be connected to each other's radio systems and can be activated very quickly. It is most frequently used during unfolding incidents such as vehicle pursuits

Another tool is to create a patch using hardware that allows different agencies to communicate on a separate channel. A common device capable of creating patches and used on MPD's Command Bus and at the city's Unified Communication Center is an ACU 1000. However, an issue that arose between the US Capitol Police and MPD involving patches with the new system was the loss of encryption. Selected channels on the MPD network are encrypted. Because of the analog base, if MPD interfaces with US Capitol on an encrypted channel, the encrypted ability is lost and that channel can be monitored by a scanner.

Enabling a patch involves notification to the respective communication centers and is best served for planned and/or prolonged events. Taking into account the need to continue rapid voice communications for unfolding situations and direct notifications, MPD allowed a select number of radios purchased at US Capitol Police expense to be programmed with MPD channels that allow two way communications with MPD's Patrol Districts and Citywide Units.

However, an upgrade by US Capitol Police would allow for our agencies to implement direct channels that would not involve patching. MPD has similar connections with DC Fire and Emergency Medical Services and Metro Transit Police. It would also allow for selected US Capitol Police users to have MPD channels programmed into their radios without having to purchase additional radios. And depending on the type of system, US Capitol Police may be able to facilitate voice communication in Metro subways when needed.

All of our efforts are for one common goal, which is to protect the citizens, residents, and visitors to the national capital region. Voice interoperability is an integral part of reaching these goals and the Metropolitan Police Department supports any efforts to improve the communications systems for the United States Capitol Police.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions that you have.