

LOCAL NEWS

Marin emergency radio project set for construction



Communications antennae stand on the roof of the Marin County Sheriff's office in San Rafael on Friday, Feb. 26, 2021. (Alan Dep/Marin Independent Journal)

By [MATTHEW PERA](mailto:mpera@marinij.com) | mpera@marinij.com |

PUBLISHED: February 26, 2021 at 5:30 p.m. | UPDATED: February 26, 2021 at 5:38 p.m.

The Marin Emergency Radio Authority has selected a contractor to begin the first phase of construction on a \$74 million project that aims to revamp the countywide radio system used by Marin's first responders.

The agency's board on Wednesday selected Fidato, a San Francisco-based consulting firm, which submitted the lower of two bids for a portion of the construction work on the project, at \$169,000.



The work is set to begin in April, said Dave Jeffries, the project manager. Pending the approval of a construction contract, Fidato will upgrade antennas and other radio equipment at sites on Mt. Barnabe, the Marin County Sheriff's Office and the Civic Center.

At the Mt. Barnabe site, the work includes adding three antennas and removing two existing ones, removing three microwave dishes, reinforcing an antenna tower and monopole and replacing the heating, ventilation and air conditioning system inside a building that houses radio equipment. Fidato's bid was \$81,000 for the work.

At the county Civic Center, the company is set to add a new microwave dish. None of the existing antennas on the building's roof will be replaced as part of the project.

At the county Sheriff's Office, the work includes removing 12 antennas on the roof and replacing them with 19 new antennas. Two new microwave dishes will be added.

Fidato's bid was \$58,000 for the work at the Civic Center and \$30,000 at the Sheriff's Office.

LD Strobel, the only other bidder, estimated the work at the three sites would cost about \$185,995, which was about 10% higher than Fidato's bid. The radio agency estimated the work would cost about \$181,000 before it issued the request for bids, according to Jeffries.

"It was nice to see the bid come in lower than what we estimated," Jeffries said.

The Marin Emergency Radio Authority, which is made up of 25 member agencies that include Marin's cities, towns and independent police and fire agencies, plans to seek bids for additional construction work this year, Jeffries said.

The radio system replacement project, initially slated for completion in 2018, is at least five years behind schedule. Jeffries said the agency is aiming to get the new system up and running in late 2023.

The project includes plans to add eight new antenna sites to the radio network and replace equipment at 10 existing sites. Five of the existing sites will be decommissioned.

"The reason we're replacing our system is because the parts and the components are nearly impossible to maintain and even get," said Marin County fire Chief Jason Weber.

The radio agency initiated the creation of Marin's existing radio system in 1998. The system, which was Marin's first countywide 911 network, cost \$21.4 million and was installed after the authority issued a \$30 million bond, which taxpayers are paying off through 2021.

The first radios connected to the new system were installed at the San Rafael Police Department in January 2004. But by the end of the decade, the network's inadequacies had become apparent.

The current system has a capacity limit for users and, in extreme circumstances, gets overloaded with radio traffic. In 2010, the network was expanded with five additional frequencies at a cost of about \$1.6 million, but the issue has persisted due to a growing number of users.



The new system is also expected to address recent changes to federal frequency requirements, which make it necessary to upgrade all radio communication networks to 700-megahertz systems.

“The stuff we’re operating on is 20-plus years old,” Weber said. “You wouldn’t have a cellphone in your pocket that’s that old.”

The project budget has risen to about \$74 million, including a roughly \$43 million contract with Motorola Solutions, nearly \$10 million in financing costs and other expenditures, according to Jeffries. Costs have gone up amid changes to the Motorola contract and the decision to opt into an extended, 15-year warranty policy on the system, which will cost an additional \$9 million.

The system overhaul is funded by a \$29-per-year parcel tax levied on properties throughout the county. The 20-year tax, which was approved by voters in 2014, is expected to raise roughly \$71 million.



Antennae stand by a fire watch tower on Mt. Barnabe in Lagunitas on Wednesday, Aug. 19, 2020. (Alan Dep/Marin Independent Journal)

Tags: [fire](#), [newsletter](#), [police](#)





9 Strange Things Millionaires Do With Their Money, But Most of Us Have Never Tried [↗](#)

By The Penny Hoarder



These are simple money moves any normal, non-

millionaire person can make today.

Matthew Pera



- [Babanui](#) • [5 hours ago](#)

To the IJ site administrator,
I posted a detailed explanation about MERA 14 hours ago, but you marked it as spam. Could you please restore that post, I can still see it on the Disqus site, but it says that you have detected it as spam and it is not seen on the IJ site. I put a lot of effort into this post, and I did it for everyone to see, please repost it.
Thank you

[Roger Babanui](#) • [2 hours ago](#)

Bab, post it again. Try it.

[hillclintgonegirl](#) • [a day ago](#) • edited

The first radios connected to the new system were installed ... in January 2004. But by the end of the decade, the network's inadequacies had become apparent. In 2010, the network was expanded ... but the issue has persisted. The system overhaul is funded by a \$29-per-year parcel tax ... approved by voters in 2014. The radio system replacement project, initially slated for completion in 2018, is at least five years behind schedule. Jeffries said the agency is aiming to get the new system up and running in late 2023. Obviously a lot of bureaucratic BS and lack of urgency despite almost yearly MAJOR firestorms in neighboring counties. God help Marin if it happens here and responses are hindered by this obsolete system. Who is being held accountable for these delays?

[Alan325](#) • [a day ago](#)

The previous failed radio system still is on my property tax bill. Let's hope this one works out better.

[angryyoungman](#) [Alan325](#) • [a day ago](#)

It won't. It's still Motorola, which excels at planned obsolescence and delayed delivery.

[Babanui](#) • [2 days ago](#) • edited

Look out for the sales tactic of selling an additional warranty, in this case it will cost an additional 9million for a 15 year extension.

We are still paying off the existing MERA system that was approved by the voters back in 1998, and communications officials were saying that the MERA system was obsolete 10 years later.

I think that spending an additional 9 million on insurance is a waste of money, who knows what the FCC might do in the next 15 years, or the actual requirements for more traffic.

When it comes to warranty insurance, let the buyer (taxpayer) beware, and good luck trying to collect on valid claims in the near or distant future

- 2_

[angryyoungman](#) [Babanui](#) • [a day ago](#)

The worry isn't so much FCC action as it is Motorola deciding they want to milk the government agency and sell it a brand new system, forced by a "shortage" of maintenance parts.

[Babanui](#) [angryyoungman](#) • [a day ago](#)

If I have time I will write a detailed report about what happened with the Motorola fiasco, I have been following the disaster from the beginning.