

Louisiana State Police Swaps Towers for Broadband Access

A Texas company is taking advantage of the synergies between public safety and the banking industry by rolling out a statewide wireless broadband network to serve both. ERF Wireless entered into an agreement with the Louisiana State Police (LSP) to use the agency's tower infrastructure as part of Louisiana BankNet, a network owned and operated by ERF and used by banks in the state for data transmission. In exchange, LSP can use part of the network for daily operations and the full network during emergencies.

Funding for the \$5 million network will be provided by participating financial institutions. The network will be rolled out in six phases, with the first three phases under way at the end of 2006. The network will cover about 80 percent of the state and take two years to build, said ERF Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Dr. Dean Cubley.

The network will offer 20 to 30 Mbps bandwidth on every link, although the backbone will ultimately support 300 Mbps. LSP can access 3 Mbps of half-duplex throughout the network, equivalent to a T1 circuit, for daily operations.

Cubley noted the synergies between the banking industry and public-safety agencies. "The banking industry has some very unique security requirements, laid down by the Federal Reserve and the FDIC (Federal Deposit Insurance Corp.), and until you satisfy all those requirements, you can't deal

with the banks," Cubley said. "We have passed that scrutiny. That makes it possible to pull public safety in and integrate that."

Motorola's Canopy equipment is being used for the network, Cubley said, along with security equipment from ERF. The network will support VoIP communications, high-resolution video surveillance at the backbone towers and across regional banking networks, and video conferencing.

ERF, a public company based in League City, Texas, is also building wireless hot spots as part of the network. "Part of our network topology includes building Wi-Fi hot spots at each tower," Cubley said. "Hot spots will cover a 5-mile radius around each tower. They will service the bank customers, and we'll make the hot spots available to the state in times of declared emergency."

The company is in discussions with other state and local public-safety agencies regarding the network. "Other agencies are interested," Cubley said, adding that both banks and law-enforcement agencies are interested in high-speed video services. "During bank robberies, banks want to have a good communications path to state and local police. We are working on some applications that take advantage of that."

ERF's banking networks are operational in Texas, Louisiana, and Missouri. The company has buildout plans in Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida.