

Looking for Allies in All the Right Places—Expanding Partnerships with Public Safety, Transportation & EMS

By David Aylward, Executive Director, The ComCARE Alliance

During a General Session at the NENA Annual Conference in Charlotte in 1999, Mark Adams described the close working relationship and common goals of NENA and the ComCARE Alliance, including our efforts to pass the “9-1-1 Bill.” Standing in the back of the room with NENA friends, I grinned. The Wireless Communications and Public Safety Act of 1999 (Senate Bill 800, or S.800) was signed into law by President Clinton in October 1999. It marked a major victory for the public safety community, and for everyone who has an interest in saving lives. Everyone in ComCARE is grateful for the active role taken in this effort by NENA and its members.

Senior government officials needed to be, and were, educated and convinced to be "champions." Multiple interests with different stakes in the legislative outcome were at the table working with public safety to get the legislation passed. The new law removed some significant barriers to deploying wireless E9-1-1, but it surely doesn't make that happen. We face the challenge of getting wireless E9-1-1 systems rapidly and efficiently implemented across the country. Local and state officials need to be leaders, and 9-1-1 officials need to secure key allies who share their concerns about rapid wireless E9-1-1 implementation. Passing this law taught all of us some lessons, which we would be well advised to apply in the future. Here are some thoughts on those lessons, and additional ideas on some allies.

Some Lessons Learned

Lesson One: Don't Try to Do It Alone. The process of passing S.800 demonstrated the enormous potential of pooling resources cooperatively for the National public safety agenda. That same model worked well in the states where a broader support constituency helped push cost-recovery bills over the line. Our members in the field often have one frustration in common: trying to accomplish major change without strong allies—and lots of them. Corollary: to complete the chain of survival, we need top-level government leaders educated and leading the charge; we won't attract that kind of political support without diverse and committed allies.

Lesson Two: Get the Experts Involved. There is a lot of expertise within NENA and ComCARE's membership, which can help each and all of us. We were repeatedly impressed by the array of expertise among NENA's membership. For example, experts from NHTSA and the Heart and Brain Injury Associations have given us the statistics on what each minute of delay (or faster response) means to injured people.

Lesson Three: Don't Question the Motives of Those Who Agree with You. It doesn't matter why someone wants to support the cause. Indeed, someone having their own motivation is usually better than talking them into adopting ours. We all benefit where the private sector also

serves the public good and we are strengthened if we know what motivates our potential allies—so we know how to attract them.

Lesson Four: Everybody Knows 9-1-1 and ER—but Nobody Really Does. Despite the extraordinary importance of these operations, and the popular TV shows, very few senior officials or members of the media truly understand the challenges facing 9-1-1 or EMS, or even how those agencies work. Thus, public education must be a major priority.

Lesson Five: We Need the Education, Too. One of the most exciting parts of ComCARE is the process of each member learning about the challenges facing the others, and then where their interests intersect. The EMS folks learned about 9-1-1, wireless and transportation. PSAPs learned about ITS and wireless. The transportation and wireless folks learned about emergencies. And so on. We can't benefit from Lesson Eight until we learn Lesson Five.

Lesson Six: Once is Not Enough. Just because we are talking about saving lives and have good ideas doesn't exempt us from competing with all the other public policy priorities in state capitals and Washington. It doesn't exempt us from the hard, detailed work of explaining, and meeting, and lobbying, and following up and educating about our concerns. Like most of ComCARE's members, NENA has a wonderful grassroots potential with members all over the country. The key is whether those local members of each of our National members (a) get activated, and (b) get linked together for local, state and National educational and lobbying efforts.

Lesson Seven: Integrate, Share the Costs, Create Business Cases, Combine Budgets.

Although E9-1-1 deployment provides a great opportunity for synergies and integrated public-private initiatives, there has been very little coordination between public safety entities, transportation officials, local governments, EMS, consumer groups, carriers and others on deploying these technologies. Initially, integration is as simple and fundamental as getting all the right stakeholders in the room to develop rational, coordinated deployment plans for each state. The physics of wireless communications don't stop at the boundaries of towns and cities. It is also as simple, but critical, as sharing data with all the agencies that can use it—and multiple *uses* and *users* will also lower individual costs.

One key new area is transportation. A wide variety of transportation officials and Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) companies are suddenly very interested in wireless E9-1-1. Many are getting involved in ComCARE. Why? There are three kinds of traffic operations/leaders whose jobs make them care about 9-1-1 in general and wireless E9-1-1 in particular. These folks have access to budgets and leadership, which can help get the job done if common cause can be found and multiple purposes can be served. State and federal transportation funding is available for integrated deployments, and there are private sector businesses in each category, which can benefit.

Traffic Managers: The various technologies used to locate all wireless phones for 9-1-1 calls can also produce the velocity and direction of phones which are turned on, or in use, or both—with no action by the subscriber. Aggregated, these data provide the real-time traffic data on primary and secondary roadways that have been a primary priority of traffic managers (who cannot afford to cover every roadway with hard-wired sensors and cameras). As traffic congestion becomes an

increasingly important issue for governments, using wireless phones as "data probes" for ITS can be very beneficial. The same wireless location data also have private sector and consumer marketing applications that can offset the cost of these systems. Two US Department of Transportation grants to states have just been announced which include this function.

Incident Managers: Their job is to orchestrate the response to incidents on the highway, ranging from full-scale disasters to breakdowns. They are already supposed to be working with 9-1-1, but that is seldom a close relationship, and one that almost never involves real time sharing of data. Whatever location technology is used, they would love to see the location of 9-1-1 calls in real time, with or without the traffic data described above, because that will allow more timely response. NENA is participating in standard setting in the Incident Management area; grants could be available for integrated deployments.

Fleet Managers: Once a wireless E9-1-1 platform is in place, the same technology may provide affordable government and commercial automatic vehicle location (AVL) systems at a fraction of the current cost. There is a multi-million dollar federal grant this year to install stand-alone AVL technology in snowplows in one corner of a large state.

Lesson Eight: Have Your Allies Tell Your Story to the Mayor, Media or Congressman.

Sometimes it's a bit dicey for the 9-1-1 director to visit the local newspaper to explain why the City Council, Mayor, or the state legislator needs to put a higher priority on upgrading PSAP capabilities. Having that story told by a delegation of an emergency nurse or doctor, the local Heart Association representative, and a few such others can work a whole lot better—and not sound self-serving.

Lesson Nine: Go Find New Friends and Get to Know Them. Beyond transportation and ITS groups, a number of other ComCARE members provide important allies for state and local public safety leaders as you try to implement advanced systems. If you don't know the local leaders of these groups, we suggest you introduce yourself. Better still, call a meeting of all of them and duplicate the wonderful experience we have had at the National level—and are starting to have around the country. (ComCARE is glad to help you here.) Here are short descriptions of a few such groups. There is a similar story behind almost every ComCARE member.

The American Heart Association is a very large, sophisticated organization with very active professional and volunteer grassroots capability in almost every major community. One of their top two policy priorities is the "Chain of Survival," of which the first link is 9-1-1. In addition to helping us lobby in Washington, these folks are organizing efforts in target cities across the country to fill in gaps in the "Chain" ("Operation Heartbeat") and getting E9-1-1 done is a major priority for them.

GM's OnStar, Veridian, Nissan and ATX are all participating in ComCARE because they have products that rely in part on 9-1-1 and EMS—and also provide benefits to public safety (e.g. location). We are launching our National Mayday Readiness Initiative (developed with strong input from NENA members) to address issues identified by NENA members, such companies, and some of our other members, like the trauma leaders. Longer term, we need to work together

to make this public/private relationship work in order for services like automatic crash notification (ACN) to be most effective in saving lives.

PSAPs and wireless carriers need to work together to understand each other's challenges. One area in which we have seen this is in addressing "dead zones," or places without wireless coverage. The same cooperation needs to be applied to more challenging issues. We are pleased to have wireless representatives from companies like SBC spending time in meetings around the country to learn how they can help PSAPs and other safety groups, as well as having CTIA's support lobbying for more money for ACN research and grants to states to upgrade 9-1-1.

Working Together Means Success

ComCARE member Jim Brady, Chairman of the Brain Injury Association, said in support of S.800, "Citizens calling 9-1-1 on their wireless phones in emergencies can often mean the difference between life and death—between quick treatment and recovery or delays that translate into long-term disabilities." Mr. Brady's statement also applies to coordinating response agencies, emergency providers and integrating incident management functions. Senior government officials at the state and local levels now need to be the leaders in the deployment and integration of these services and technologies.

We hope PSAP directors and transportation officials, carriers and EMS, and so on, will reach out to one another to pool resources, budgets, knowledge and educational efforts; this means sharing technologies and platforms as much as possible. Multiple uses will lower costs, just as multiple delegation lobbying will more effectively win friends and allies. We won't find the synergies and alliances that will speed deployment of 21st Century safety technologies unless we look for them—but we have shown how successful we can be when we work together.

ComCARE ("Communications for Coordinated Assistance & Response to Emergencies") is a coalition of more than 50 organizations and corporations including NENA, APCO, nurses, doctors, emergency medical technicians, wireless companies, public safety and health officials, law enforcement groups, automobile and technology companies, telematics suppliers, transportation and safety groups, and others who are working to encourage the deployment of life-saving wireless communications networks and technologies that will more efficiently connect America's mobile public to emergency agencies. To get involved or learn more about the ComCARE Alliance, please visit our web site at www.comcare.org or contact Steve Seitz at (202) 429-0574.