

As peaceful and serene as our island living is, there is a disaster looming right under our noses. The EMS radio communication system is limited, archaic and highly vulnerable to failure. This is the system that we depend on to send the EMTs, fire trucks, sheriff and road crews out when we need them. The current system is 1960's technology: when repairs are needed, parts are hard to find and often need to be modified to make them work in our system.

Currently there are only 3 transmitter-receivers, or base stations, in the county. This creates significant gaps in radio coverage producing numerous problems. For example, when a first responder needs backup or an ambulance, they radio to Dispatch. Often the call is garbled, and Dispatch wastes precious time deciphering what is being said. If communication is needed between different agencies such as fire and EMT's, Dispatch is the go-between and has to relay messages back and forth, not always with clear signals, again wasting precious time. There is also the possibility of errors being introduced this way. Another issue is the quantity of dead zones in the county where radio signals don't get through. We've all experienced this with our cell phones, which utilize similar radio technology, just on a different set of frequencies.

This is not a new problem. County agencies have been discussing and researching this for over 20 years. It makes sense to act before we have a catastrophic failure with the system or a major disaster where lives are at stake and response time is critical. The different agencies affected have been working together to come up with a responsible proposal. They are required to use a State authorized vendor and they have found a qualified vendor and product that is a good fit for our island needs.

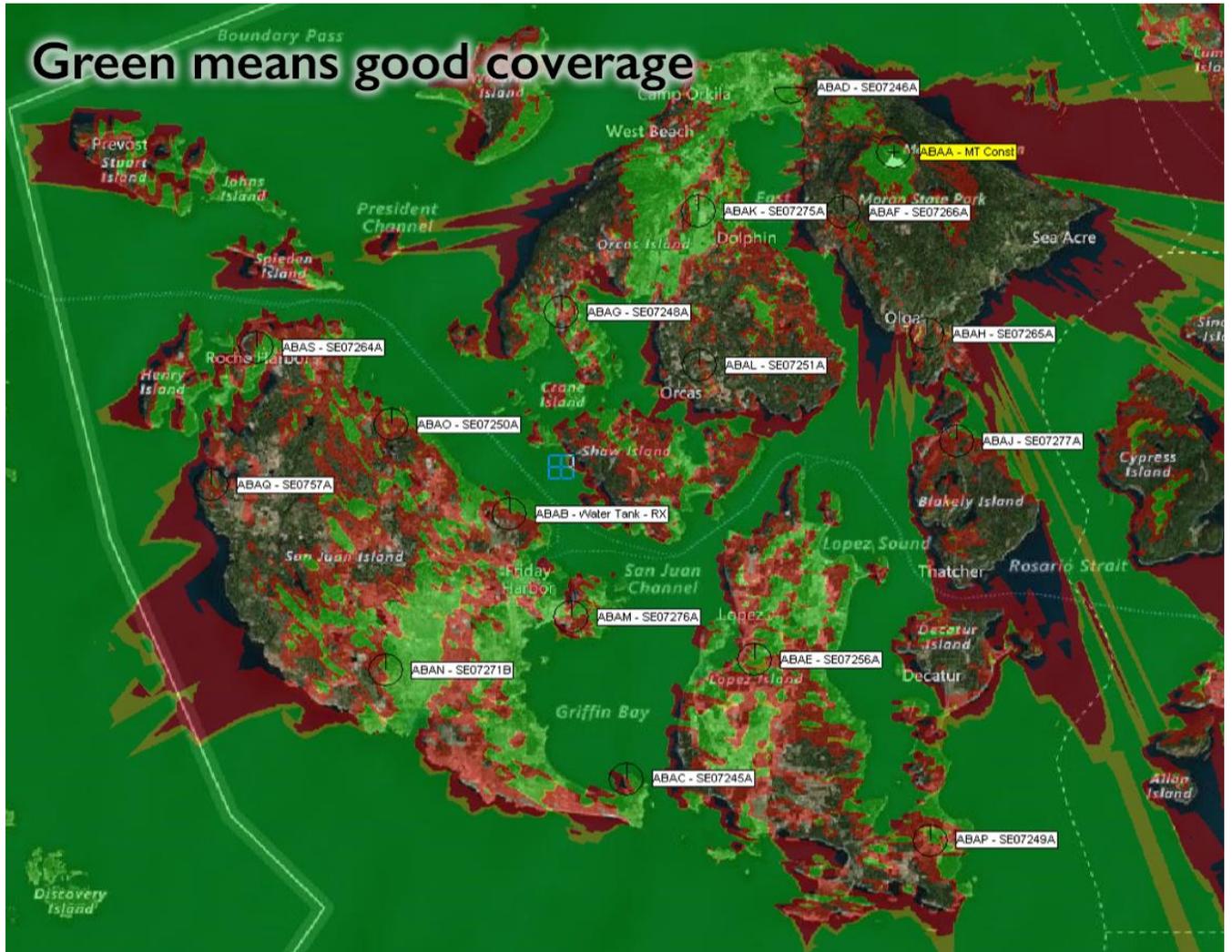
Codan Radio Communications out of Victoria has developed an EMS "simulcast" communication system that is designed specifically for isolated locations. It is being successfully used by two other Washington counties, Chelan/Douglas and Whitman counties. This system will add modern technology compatible with the existing analog radios currently in patrol rigs, fire trucks, ambulances, road crew's trucks, etc. It will increase the number of base stations from 3 to 48—all interlinked via Rockisland fiber, improving the quality of radio calls and significantly reducing the amount of "radio free" dead zones in the islands. Another benefit is that Dispatch can link agencies together like a conference call so that they can communicate directly with each other in emergencies.

The cost of this system is \$3 million over 5 years for capital improvements and maintenance, or roughly \$120,000 per year. No new land needs to be purchased & permitted for new towers. Rockisland will be providing 24/7 data support at a reasonable, low rate.

Our San Juan County emergency services are utilized by residents and visitors (some 2,000,000 last year alone) alike, so it is only fitting that the source of funding come from both. The proposal is for an increase in the County sales tax by .2 percent, from 8.1% to 8.3%. It is estimated that the cost per island family is **roughly \$50–\$80 per year**. This is significantly less than other counties in the US have spent upgrading their emergency communications to meet the federal post-9/11 interoperability recommendations.

We are all familiar with dead radio (including cell) zones. We can't expect our EMS and first responders to continue to be hindered by these issues when a reasonable and affordable fix is available.

Current Coverage Map



Projected Coverage with Codan System

(Please note this is a compilation of several map overlays, although it looks like Westside neighborhoods will still have poor coverage, EMS and fire will have much better coverage than we have now and then this depicts)

