

## Application Score Sheet

Proposed Project: Walton County, Public Safety Communications System (#324)  
Proposed Project/Program County: Walton  
Board of County Commission Support: Yes  
Rural County: Yes  
Opportunity Zone: County wide project

Total Projected Project Cost: \$40,596,971  
Match Provided: \$20,444,300  
Triumph Funds Requested: \$20,152,671 (49.6%)  
Triumph Funds Recommended by Staff: up to \$20,152,671

Score: B  
ROI: Unassignable

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### **Economic Analysis, Impact and Score**

Walton County is seeking up to \$20,152,671 in Triumph Gulf Coast funding to purchase a new County-wide P25 interoperable land mobile radio (LMR) system. Walton County and the Walton County Sheriff's Office will be responsible for a minimum of \$20,444,300 of the total project cost. The Triumph share of the total project cost is thus 49.6 percent.

While this project does not propose a new business or create jobs, a reliable public safety community system is paramount to businesses wanting to expand or locate in Walton County. The county's emergency responders such as law enforcement, fire and rescue, emergency medical services and emergency operations are using an emergency communication system and devices (radios) that are aging, and incapable of supporting emergency needs. The current LMR system operates at its full capacity in terms of the numbers of radios and number of channels used, supporting 1,172 users. Walton's existing radio towers, constructed in 2000 and 2012 do not meet State Law Enforcement Radio System (SLERS) standards in terms of capacity and coverage.

The new proposed LMR network will have high-capacity transmission, and will achieve the coverage, capacity, and interoperability requirements that support both current and continued population, business, industry, and visitor growth.

A 2019 study by the MITRE Corporation uses several alternative methods to assess the value of equipment delivered using FEMA funding. The present project shares some of those characteristics. Subject matter experts assessed the monetary value of these investments when measured against standards of reduced risk of lives lost, of injuries, of time without necessities, or property damages, and of business losses, as well as quality of life. After weighting these categories, the study found an overall relative change in benefits of 5.4 percent from the model baseline in an application to 16 Florida counties, but that variance in the valuation of components

driving this change was large and meant that a positive ROI could not be definitively associated with the FEMA spending. MITRE found similarly inconclusive results in applying revealed preference techniques and in applying breakeven analysis to examine the benefits to emergency preparedness spending.

Taken together, the enhanced emergency preparedness could be responsible for badly needed emergency communications capability in Walton County. The project is clearly eligible for funding under the provisions enacted by the Legislature. However, it is not possible to assign a direct job count to the project. For this reason, staff score this project as a “B.”

### **Project Summary (based on information provided by the applicant)**

The Walton County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) is requesting a grant of up to \$20,152,671 over 36 months for equipment needed to upgrade Walton County’s public safety communication system. The county signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Walton County Sheriff’s Office (WCSO) designating the WCSO as the project lead and implementation agency by the BOCC. The grant funds will be used for the purchase and installation of P25 master cores and dispatch centers equipment, simulcast and microwave backhaul systems, P25 equipment for 21 tower sites, talk group system for smartphones, and multi-band mobile and portable radio systems. The County’s match includes funds for new towers and long-term system maintenance.

The current land mobile radio (LMR) technology and tower infrastructure are insufficient to achieve coverage, capacity, and interoperability requirements. The County needs to build a reliable, scalable public safety LMR network with high-capacity transmission to respond to disasters.

On behalf of the County, the WCSO currently supports 1,172 base, mobile, and LMR public safety and service users within the State Law Enforcement Radio System (SLERS). However, the County’s current LMR system operates at the maximum number of radios and channels (LID capacity), is incapable of further expansion, and assessments revealed poor radio communications within and around county schools.

Evidence of these findings and chronic queuing, signal losses, and dead spots led the WCSO in January 2023 to duly procure and contract for a third-party Public Safety Radio Analysis (Omnicom Consulting Group, Inc.) to diagnose the current system’s degradation, paid for by the County, and provide a Technical Assessment for the project scope.

The resulting Technical Assessment determined a need for up to 15 additional public safety radio towers to meet countywide 95% Service Area Reliability (SAR) for indoor and outdoor coverage. Currently, the Walton County SLERS is deployed in the L3 Harris Enhanced Digital Access Communications System (EDACS) across three county-owned and three state-owned tower sites. However, the Florida SLERS converted to Project 25 (P25) Phase 2 technology in 2024 to ensure universal interoperability and increased radio traffic capacity. Walton’s existing radio towers, constructed in 2000 and 2012, do not meet SLERS P25 capacity and coverage requirements.

Expanded building construction, population, and visitors' strain LMR service coverage contributing to lost signals, dead spots, and queuing due to geographic features and increased system utilization. Walton County began experiencing successive decades of population gains exceeding 35% beginning in 1990 (U.S. Census Bureau) and recently hosted 5.3 million visitors (2023 Walton County Tourism Annual Report). The County has only two radio towers south of Choctawhatchee Bay, Walton's most-concentrated population and visitor sector. Installation of a P25 simulcast system and expanded tower infrastructure will achieve the coverage, capacity, and interoperability requirements that support both current and continued population, business, industry, and visitor growth.

The County and WCSO will be responsible for \$34,954,293 in matching funds for the countywide tower infrastructure and associated infrastructure, annual system maintenance, training and technology refreshes over a 15-year period. Meeting the project's established coverage objectives will require the design and construction of at least 15 new tower sites on county-owned or county-provided land, and in May 2024 Walton County posted a separate tower site design and construction ITN in support of the planned P25 radio communication system. Walton County and the WCSO will assume the full cost of this portion of the project.

High-capacity safety communication networks increase adaptability, facilitate interoperability, and enable faster responses that build public confidence and resilience. Resilience is a strategy for advancing long-term economic diversification. This proposal builds long-term resilience by increasing the County's ability to respond to disasters.

As a rural-suburban and economically bifurcated county, Walton's population and visitor growth heavily exists within hurricane- and flood-prone South Walton where incomes and home values significantly exceed those in North Walton. Over 40-percent of North Walton households earn annual incomes below \$35,000 (ESRI, 2019), and the effects of public safety crises typically affect poorer areas more adversely creating uneven resiliency baselines. According to the Florida Legislature's Office of Economic and Demographic Research, Walton County is Florida's 39th most populous county in the state with an estimated growth rate of 10% from 2020-2023. The ten-year increments for population growth estimates in Walton County through 2050 indicate nearly doubling the current population within three decades.

The WCSO is a key participant in Florida's mutual aid and regional response network, and Walton's P25 network and infrastructure installation will enhance surrounding counties' interoperability and coverage with increased functionality, speed, and integrated operations. The region is familiar with both human-caused and natural disaster disruptions and this mission-critical equipment will provide redundant network reliability and effective resource usage to help ensure public safety disruptions do not minimize economic growth.

**Budget and Funding**

See attached

**Letters of Support**

Walton County Board of County Commissioners

Walton County Sheriff

City of Freeport

City of DeFuniak Springs

Walton Area Chamber

**Exhibit B**

**#324 Walton County Public Safety Communication System**

Budget

Estimated construction start date if applicable 1/2/25

Estimated education component start date if applicable n/a

	Radio Equipment	Radio Maintenance	Tower Construction	Tower rent/maintenance	Consultants	Total
<b>Project Total</b>						
Calendar Year 2025	6,045,801.00	-	10,000,000.00	-	121,000.00	16,166,801.00
Calendar Year 2026	6,045,801.00	-	-	200,000.00	121,600.00	6,367,401.00
Calendar Year 2027	8,061,069.00	-	-	201,000.00	122,200.00	8,384,269.00
Calendar Year 2028	-	-	-	202,000.00	54,500.00	256,500.00
Calendar Year 2029	-	1,470,000.00	-	203,000.00	-	1,673,000.00
Calendar Year 2030	-	740,000.00	-	204,000.00	-	944,000.00
Calendar Year 2031	-	760,000.00	-	205,000.00	-	965,000.00
Calendar Year 2032	-	775,000.00	-	206,000.00	-	981,000.00
Calendar Year 2033	-	790,000.00	-	207,000.00	-	997,000.00
Calendar Year 2034	-	1,575,000.00	-	208,000.00	-	1,783,000.00
Calendar Year 2035	-	825,000.00	-	209,000.00	-	1,034,000.00
Calendar Year 2036	-	835,000.00	-	210,000.00	-	1,045,000.00
<b>Project Total</b>	<b>20,152,671.00</b>	<b>7,770,000.00</b>	<b>10,000,000.00</b>	<b>2,255,000.00</b>	<b>419,300.00</b>	<b>40,596,971.00</b>

<b>Triumph</b>						
Calendar Year 2025	6,045,801.00					6,045,801.00
Calendar Year 2026	6,045,801.00					6,045,801.00
Calendar Year 2027	8,061,069.00					8,061,069.00
Calendar Year 2028						-
Calendar Year 2029						-
Calendar Year 2030						-
Calendar Year 2031						-
Calendar Year 2032						-
Calendar Year 2033						-
Calendar Year 2034						-
Calendar Year 2035						-
Calendar Year 2036						-
<b>Triumph Total</b>	<b>20,152,671.00</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>20,152,671.00</b>

49.6%

<b>Grantee</b>						
Calendar Year 2025		-	10,000,000.00	-	121,000.00	10,121,000.00
Calendar Year 2026		-	-	200,000.00	121,600.00	321,600.00
Calendar Year 2027		-	-	201,000.00	122,200.00	323,200.00
Calendar Year 2028		-	-	202,000.00	54,500.00	256,500.00
Calendar Year 2029		1,470,000.00	-	203,000.00	-	1,673,000.00
Calendar Year 2030		740,000.00	-	204,000.00	-	944,000.00
Calendar Year 2031		760,000.00	-	205,000.00	-	965,000.00
Calendar Year 2032		775,000.00	-	206,000.00	-	981,000.00
Calendar Year 2033		790,000.00	-	207,000.00	-	997,000.00
Calendar Year 2034		1,575,000.00	-	208,000.00	-	1,783,000.00
Calendar Year 2035		825,000.00	-	209,000.00	-	1,034,000.00
Calendar Year 2036		835,000.00	-	210,000.00	-	1,045,000.00
<b>Grantee Total</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>7,770,000.00</b>	<b>10,000,000.00</b>	<b>2,255,000.00</b>	<b>419,300.00</b>	<b>20,444,300.00</b>

50.4%