Southern Linc



Bridging the Gap

Blount County, Alabama Communications District selects Southern Linc to integrate two-way radio systems for public safety employees

An Aging System

Blount County Communications District (BCCD) had relied on a VHF radio system for decades to support 911 emergency medical dispatch and crisis intervention services. But over time, the system had been pushed well beyond its intended lifespan. Maintenance was becoming more difficult. Reliability was harder to guarantee. And known coverage gaps, especially for personnel on foot in difficult environments, were creating real operation concerns in mission critical situations.

Like many public safety agencies across the country, BCCD found itself facing a difficult question: How do you modernize an aging communications network without assuming too much cost and complexity?

The county could not rely on stopgap measures forever. Modern solutions offered clear advantages: stronger reliability, over-the-air encryption, and interoperable LMR and LTE. That interoperability mattered. As more agencies across Alabama adopted newer systems, including the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency (ALEA), the ability to communicate across networks was becoming increasingly important for coordination and mutual aid.

An Incomplete Fix

In an effort to modernize, Blount County invested in a P25 system about five years ago. The county built two new radio sites and purchased new handheld radios for its public safety personnel, aiming to create a modern, standards-compliant communications environment.

But that investment only solved part of the problem. It soon became clear that two sites would not deliver the countywide coverage the district needed. Expanding the system would require even more infrastructure and funding—an expensive step after already committing significant resources to the P25 system—leaving BCCD in a very difficult position.

Bridging the Networks

Southern Linc had previously worked with Blount County, and Connie Stinnett, Senior Market Sales Executive for Southern Linc, had been rebuilding that relationship over time—sharing updates about Southern Linc's evolving capabilities. Around that time, BCCD came under new leadership with Executive Director Derrick Walker, who was determined to find a practical solution to the communication challenges he had inherited.

When Connie Stinnett secured a meeting with the county, Southern Linc brought forward an option that could be deployed quickly, work with the systems already in place and stay within the county's budget.

"We were able to propose a full Catalyst Communications Technologies gateway and dispatch console solution," said Stinnett. "That allowed them to integrate their existing P25 system with others. Director Walker did not want to mandate what people had to use, so if somebody had a major carrier, such as the school system, then he wanted them to be able to use that as well. He also incorporated one VHF channel and then, of course, Southern Linc."

Rather than forcing the county into a costly rip-and-replace approach, the solution made it possible to connect what already existed, creating a more flexible communication environment. BCCD could bridge disparate networks for local and regional coverage—and extend nationwide through Southern Linc's roaming agreements with major carriers.

Along with the Catalyst solution, BCCD purchased Sonim devices from Southern Linc for their public safety departments, which provided both LTE voice and mission critical push-to-talk (MCPTT) capabilities. According to Walker, the solution also made it easier to implement over-the-air changes while maintaining full encryption across law enforcement channels—an essential requirement for public safety communications.

"We filled a need for coverage immediately. Southern Linc has way more than two sites," said Stinnett. "Southern Linc's pre-existing site infrastructure delivered better coverage, redundancy, reliability and performance throughout the county, which is a mission critical need for the public safety department. Further, the solution comes at a fraction of the cost and complexity of building a new standalone LMR system themselves."

"The Catalyst solution provides BCCD with better coverage, better MCPTT performance and thousands of miles of incremental calling capability at a fraction of the cost of private network buildout," said Walker.



A Stronger Safety Net

The multi-layered communications architecture blended LTE, local ISP and Starlink for additional redundancy. If one channel becomes unavailable, another can help maintain continuity. This multi-layered redundancy helped BCCD lower long-term risk and create a more scalable solution.

Designed to serve as a native MCPTT application, the Catalyst gateway and dispatch console gives the district a unified command-and-control communications environment. The solution was much more than a quick fix; it was a forward-looking step toward a more integrated communications network.

"Think of it like building a safety net with three strands: Southern Linc's LTE network serves as the primary layer, with the P25 network and satellite service providing additional layers of redundancy to ensure continuity during critical situations," Walker stated.

The improved system is already enabling better coordination across the county and beyond. While Director Walker sees additional opportunities to expand its interoperable LMR and LTE capabilities, including new handsets, those steps hinge upon future funding, which Walker plans to advocate for.

Providing Critical Support

As BCCD adopted a more layered communications environment, troubleshooting could become more complex. Early on, the district sometimes struggled to determine whether an issue stemmed from the device, the network, the P25 system, a service provider or simple user error.



That changed as Southern Linc expanded its technical support involvement.

"I feel like a turning point was when we brought in our dedicated Technical Support group," said Leslie Benton, Market Sales Executive at Southern Linc. "It allowed us to actually track any issues they were having and determine where the issue came from."

BCCD now has interoperable MCPTT communications across the County and with State agencies using Southern Linc including Alabama Highway Patrol, Alabama State Bureau of Investigation, Alabama Bureau of Pardons and Parole, Alabama Department of Transportation, Alabama Emergency Management Agency and Alabama Emergency EMS.

Now, Blount County is focused on validating that every layer of its communications architecture—from primary networks to failover systems—performs reliably during real-world incidents. This emphasis on technical resilience transforms the integration from a short-term fix into a strategic investment, representing a forward-looking shift toward secure, robust communications that can withstand critical demands.

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