
Recommendations

Recommendation 1. The General Assembly should direct the Department of Public Safety to increase its VIPER outreach efforts to improve the engagement of VIPER stakeholders.

As discussed in Finding 3, VIPER points of contact for North Carolina's 100 counties reported high user satisfaction when surveyed by the Program Evaluation Division. However, the State Highway Patrol does not have a formal system for engaging with VIPER system users and receiving feedback. Currently, the State Highway Patrol receives feedback and suggestions regarding VIPER through the State Interoperability Executive Committee and the Domestic Preparedness Regions communications subcommittee representatives to the State Interoperability Executive Committee.

In order to track and measure user satisfaction and feedback over time, the General Assembly should direct the Department of Public Safety to conduct an annual survey of local, state, and federal users of VIPER and report on the results to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Justice and Public Safety. The Department of Public Safety should be directed to report the survey results annually to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Justice and Public Safety by November 1 beginning in 2019. The questions created by the Program Evaluation Division that appear in Appendix B provide a potential template for this survey.

The General Assembly should also direct the Department of Public Safety to increase outreach to VIPER stakeholders beyond those that participate in the State Interoperability Executive Committee. By engaging VIPER stakeholders by zone or region via meetings or focus groups, the Department of Public Safety could become aware of and address VIPER issues and concerns that are unique to certain stakeholders. State Highway Patrol regional offices could potentially serve as a base for these groups or meetings.

Recommendation 2. The General Assembly should direct the Department of Public Safety to determine the value of in-kind contributions provided to the VIPER system.

As discussed in Finding 4, the State Highway Patrol relies on partnerships with local government entities, the federal government, and non-governmental entities to provide in-kind contributions to support the VIPER system. These in-kind contributions include funding, land, buildings, towers, and equipment for VIPER sites across North Carolina. The State Highway Patrol has not determined the total value of these in-kind contributions supporting the VIPER system.

The General Assembly should direct the Department of Public Safety to determine the value of in-kind contributions supporting the VIPER system and inform the General Assembly of its findings. The Department of Public Safety should report this information to the Joint Oversight Committee on Justice and Public Safety by July 1, 2019.

Recommendation 3. The General Assembly should consider appropriating funds to upgrade VIPER base stations and establish routine software updates.

As discussed in Finding 5, failure to upgrade VIPER’s base stations and related software will adversely affect VIPER’s continued reliability and interoperability. The VIPER system’s functionality and reliability will begin to deteriorate if base station upgrades do not occur and the associated software is not maintained.

To ensure that the VIPER system’s functionality and reliability are maintained, the General Assembly should consider appropriating state funds for VIPER base station upgrades and associated software updates. To fully fund these upgrades, the State Highway Patrol requires \$34.8 million in nonrecurring appropriations and \$2.3 million in recurring appropriations. Exhibit 21 summarizes the state appropriations requirements.

Exhibit 21

State Appropriations for VIPER System Upgrades Can Be Split Between Fiscal Years 2018–19 and 2019–20

Upgrade Description	Fiscal Year 2018–19		Fiscal Year 2019–20	
GTR Base Stations	\$14,250,265	NR	\$14,250,265	NR
Service Upgrade Assurance Catch-Up	5,000,000	NR	0	
MOSCAD Security Monitoring	1,300,000	NR	0	
Service Upgrade Assurance Updates	2,250,000	R	2,250,000	R
Total Appropriations	\$22,800,265		\$16,500,265	

Notes: NR stands for nonrecurring. R stands for recurring. The recurring appropriation for the Service Upgrade Assurance updates assumes that the State Highway Patrol would receive a 10% discount from Motorola, which would reduce state funding from \$2,500,000 to \$2,250,000 and save \$250,000 annually.

Source: Program Evaluation Division based on information from the State Highway Patrol.

The nonrecurring funding for upgrading the base stations can be split over two fiscal years (\$14.3 million each fiscal year) because the State Highway Patrol plans to install the upgrades over a 24-month time period.

Appendices

- Appendix A: History of VIPER Buildout in North Carolina
- Appendix B: Results of Survey of VIPER County Points of Contact

Agency Responses

A draft of this report was submitted to the Department of Public Safety and the Department of Information Technology to review. Their responses are provided following the report.