



May 23, 2018

Chairman Ajit Pai
Commissioner Mignon Clyburn
Commissioner Michael O’Rielly
Commissioner Brendan Carr
Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Mr. Chairman and Commissioners:

The Portland Metropolitan Region formed the Regional Disaster Preparedness Organization (RDPO) in 2012 as a partnership between government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and private sector stakeholders across five counties and two states to increase the region’s resilience to disasters. We, the RDPO Policy Committee, see the Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) system as an emerging vital communications tool benefitting our region and the entire country. We applaud recent efforts by the FCC to improve WEA but are concerned these changes do not go far enough. We encourage you to adopt additional multimedia enhancements to increase WEA’s effectiveness.

Our region faces many natural and human-caused hazards, including but not limited to earthquakes, floods, wildfires, winter weather, landslides, volcanic eruptions, mass shootings, explosive devices, hazardous chemicals, radiological releases, and transportation accidents. Any incident arising from these hazards could result in the use of WEA to warn the public to take quick action. However, up until this point, WEA has only been activated once in our region due to limitations with the system. In February 2014, the City of Portland issued a county-wide message urging residents to avoid travel during an ice storm.

Forthcoming improvements to provide targeted messaging, increase character count, provide a Spanish-language function, and test the system will increase WEA’s utility to local authorities. However, additional multimedia enhancements are still needed to ensure emergency warnings are correctly understood by the public – specifically the ability to send an image in a WEA message and provide alerts in languages other than English and Spanish.

We see these additional enhancements as critical to ensuring warnings reach the whole community, including residents with access and functional needs. Individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing need visual cues not currently available in WEA messages. Allowing multimedia content, including thumbnail images and instructional infographics, in WEA messages on current and future networks is not only necessary but expected by the public.

We respectfully urge the FCC take immediate action to mandate additional multimedia enhancements to WEA messages and build on the progress made in recent years. We also encourage you to continue to solicit public input and consider future improvements to ensure WEA remains an effective and reliable emergency communications tool.

Sincerely,

The Regional Disaster Preparedness Policy Committee:

Karylinn Echols, Councilor, City of Gresham (Chair)

Jim Bernard, Chair, Clackamas County (Vice Chair)

Ted Wheeler, Mayor, City of Portland

Anne McEnerny-Ogle, Mayor, City of Vancouver

Cate Arnold, Councilor, City of Beaverton

Cathi Forsythe, Councilor, City of Fairview

Vince Granato, Chief Operating Officer, Port of Portland

Kathryn Harrington, Councilor, Metro

Margaret Magruder, Commissioner, Columbia County

Sharon Meieran, Commissioner, Multnomah County

Harry Saporta, Safety & Security Executive, Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon

Dick Schouten, Commissioner, Washington County

Jeanne Stewart, PC Immediate Past Chair; Councilor, Clark County

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