

DVRPC's Regional Digital Alerting Deployment: Protecting Responders, Improving Safety



By Delaware Valley RPC

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Overview

The Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC), the metropolitan planning organization for the nine-county Greater Philadelphia region spanning Pennsylvania and New Jersey, launched a Regional Digital Alerting Program to better protect first responders working along the roadway. By reallocating existing Unified Planning Work Program funds, DVRPC equipped response vehicles with Haas Alert digital alerting technology at zero cost to participating agencies, delivering safety benefits years sooner than traditional grant funding would have allowed. The program now spans 671 vehicles across 149 agencies, including 34 PennDOT Freeway Service Patrol vehicles, and has sent more than 2.6 million digital alerts warning approaching motorists to slow down or move over. This case study shows how a metropolitan planning organization (MPO) moved beyond its traditional long-range planning role to deliver an operational, life-saving safety improvement at regional scale.

In this case study you will learn:

1. How DVRPC repurposed existing Unified Planning Work Program funds to deploy digital alerting technology at zero cost to first responders and years ahead of traditional grant timelines
2. Why DVRPC leveraged its established traffic incident management task forces to build trust, engage responder agencies, and coordinate a multidisciplinary deployment across two states and nine counties
3. How a clearly structured implementation model pairing DVRPC, Newcom Global, and Haas Alert with responder agencies created a replicable framework other MPOs can use to deploy emerging safety technologies at scale

BACKGROUND

Hundreds of first responders are struck on our country's roadways every year while simply doing their jobs—forever changing their lives and the lives of their families. Though actions such as individual state Move Over Laws help mitigate struck-bys, responders and advocates continue to call for greater protection. Research shows digital alerts encourage earlier lane changes and safer driver behavior. More can and must be done to help those who risk their lives to assist the motoring public. That is exactly what DVRPC, the MPO for the Greater Philadelphia region serving nine counties across Pennsylvania and New Jersey, set out to accomplish through its Digital Alerting Program by installing Haas Alert technology across hundreds of response vehicles, providing an additional layer of protection at zero cost to first responders. While MPOs traditionally focus on long-range planning, DVRPC recognized an opportunity to directly influence near-term roadway safety and moved quickly to implement a regional operational solution. Digital alerting sends warnings to approaching motorists when emergency lights are activated, giving drivers time to slow down or change lanes while improving situational awareness for responding agencies. Field and academic research supports the effectiveness of this technology. Improved driver behavior also supports smoother traffic flow, reducing congestion and the likelihood of secondary crashes. Discussions began in 2018 through DVRPC's traffic incident management (TIM) task forces, forums where first responders and transportation operators discuss roadway challenges. As concern about responder risk grew, DVRPC was uniquely positioned to move beyond information sharing and lead the regional deployment of this technology, operationalizing it with responder safety as its top priority.

TSMO PLANNING, STRATEGIES, AND DEPLOYMENT

To launch the initiative, DVRPC worked closely with counties, departments of transportation (DOTs), and local jurisdictions to reallocate existing Unified Planning Work Program resources to fully fund purchase, installation, and three-year subscriptions. Rather than waiting for discretionary grant funding, DVRPC accelerated deployment and delivered safety benefits years sooner than traditional funding pathways would have allowed. Two parallel efforts guided early implementation: securing a vendor and identifying participating agencies. Through an open procurement process, DVRPC selected Newcom Global to lead installation, with Haas Alert providing the technology platform. Agency selection criteria focused on roadway exposure, active involvement in TIM task forces, and direct feedback from task force leadership while ensuring regional balance. Fire departments received three devices, with emergency medical services (EMS) and police receiving five. What began as a safety discussion evolved into one of the nation's larger multidisciplinary digital alerting deployments.

The installation and activation of Haas Alert proved to be a significant regional logistical undertaking. With 112 agencies and 504 vehicles across two states and nine counties in the first phase, coordination between DVRPC, vendors, and responder agencies was essential. Newcom Global installation teams deployed across the Philadelphia region to install and activate the technology, a process more complex than anticipated. Scheduling site access for over a hundred active agencies required extensive coordination through calls, emails, shared spreadsheets, and real-time mapping, along with a level of customer service that had been underestimated. Vehicles needed to be taken out of service for installation while remaining readily accessible at a moment's notice for emergency response. Once activated, agencies received login credentials to monitor vehicles in real time and access monthly usage reports that support training and operational awareness.

Effective communication was critical to the successful deployment of the Digital Alerting Program. Because deployment required coordination across more than 100 active agencies, communication became the backbone of implementation, aligning DVRPC, vendors, and responder agencies around a shared safety mission. The program required engagement across fire, EMS, law enforcement, DOT partners, and multiple jurisdictions, reinforcing a collective commitment to responder safety. DVRPC leveraged its long-standing TIM task force meetings as a trusted regional forum to introduce the technology, engage responder agencies, and support participation. These established relationships accelerated deployment and strengthened partner confidence throughout implementation. DVRPC maintained close communication with Newcom Global and Haas Alert to coordinate installation logistics, resolve challenges, support participating agencies, and apply lessons learned to improve deployments in subsequent phases. Even with the program fully operational, communication remains ongoing. DVRPC continues coordinating with participating agencies and vendors as contacts

OUTCOMES, BENEFITS, AND LEARNINGS

District 4's coordinated approach has delivered measurable improvements in program maturity and operational readiness. In 2025, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) TIM Self-Assessment Score improved from 83.01 to 85.98, reflecting stronger inter-agency engagement, standardized practices, and enhanced corridor-level coordination. The integration of training, field exercises, and on-scene coordination has reinforced the value of deploying resources based on corridor conditions rather than individual incidents alone. Key learnings include the importance of validating response plans through live simulations, maintaining standardized protocols across agencies, and embedding coordination leadership directly into high-risk incident scenes.

