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ianews**

Icom America's Monthly Newsletter

Portage Area Transit Gears Up for Digital Migration



from January 2010

Sales consisting of seven mobiles rarely make headlines. But what makes Jeff Mitchell's recent sale to the Portage Area Regional Transit Authority noteworthy is the promise of what is still to come.

Portage Area Regional Transit Authority (PARTA) recently purchased seven new Icom F6061D mobiles from Mitchell Communications of Akron, Ohio. The transit authority, which operates 25 large passenger buses and 40 light transit vehicles, provides public bus service throughout Portage County, Ohio, and services Kent State University.

Mitchell Communications, Inc.
www.mitchellcom.com

PARTA is in the initial stages of replacing its entire fleet of old analog radios as it transitions to a digital narrowband system over the next year. It also plans to install two Icom FR6000 repeaters that will provide coverage across Portage County's 500 square mile region.

Mitchell says the transit authority's previous radio system, which consisted of mostly Icom F121 mobiles and two Icom FR4000 repeaters, was still functioning well, but PARTA wanted to replace its system in advance of the FCC's January 1, 2013, narrowband deadline.

"The main reason it decided to upgrade to the IDAS™ system is the upcoming narrowband deadline," Mitchell says. "They wanted to go digital now and take advantage of the other capabilities offered by digital IDAS™ radios."

Icom IDAS digital land mobile radio systems provide improved audio and a greater coverage area than analog FM radios. And because IDAS radios are capable of operating in mixed analog/digital mode, the transit authority can gradually integrate IDAS technology into its current analog system.

"The long-term plan is to move to a digital IDAS radio system, including data," Mitchell says. "We are hoping to incorporate mobile data terminals into the radios in the future — hopefully this year."

PARTA currently spends thousands of dollars each month on commercial cellular network airtime fees for its data mobile component. "Once we can integrate data on the IDAS system, it will be very cost-effective for them," Mitchell says.



The first seven F6061D's are up and running, and the next step is to install the first of two FR6000 repeaters. The transit authority is pleased with the performance of the F6061D, especially its improved range and enhanced audio.

For Mitchell, who sold PARTA its previous Icom system and has a long-standing service agreement with the transit authority, this is the fourth major



implementation of an IDAS digital radio system. Other customers include a manufacturing plant, scrap yard, and art museum. Mitchell also is in preliminary talks with two other manufacturing plants to develop and implement IDAS digital radio systems.



"All three systems have been very, very well received," he says. From a sales position, "the demonstrations sell it. Customers are amazed by the difference in audio between analog and digital."

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