

## **Briefing paper on HC Resolution 04-8-390** (Offer for no cost public safety dispatching)

### **Executive Summary:**

The following information includes a reiteration of the handouts already in the hands of the PS&RS Committee (Section I below). It also adds excerpts from 3 consolidation studies; the Minnesota Department of Public Safety Consolidation Study (Section II below), a PSC Alliance, Inc. study report commissioned by a group of 10 Hennepin County municipalities including Minneapolis (Section III), and a follow-on study by PSC Alliance, Inc. commissioned by 4 of the aforementioned suburbs (Section IV). The study in Section IV included information on the Hennepin County Sheriff's Dispatch Center collected by and reported on by PSC Alliance, Inc.

Recurrent themes remind the reader that careful planning, proper governance, agreed-to and effective procedures, focus on personnel, and attention to technology needs and synergy can and has led to Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) consolidations that have met the two universally accepted objectives of:

- Maintaining or improving public safety through communications functions related thereto; and
- Costs that are less in a consolidated PSAP than would have been experienced if the consolidated entities had remained separate.

Having said that, all of the studies and experiences of the PSAPs that have consolidated point to multiple and dangerous pitfalls that must be avoided in order to meet the two objectives listed above. All three studies focused on consolidating smaller PSAPs together or into a larger one (not 2 large ones consolidating into each other). It was recognized and stated that consolidation gains are most readily had when small, inefficient PSAPs band together or join into a larger one.

The following excerpts are voluminous, but only represent a small portion of the entire reports. I included what I believed were the most relevant portions of the study. For ease of reading I have highlighted and enlarged those sections that I feel are most relevant, but those sections have been left intact to maintain some of the context of the respective reports.

### Conclusion:

Consolidation can perhaps be successfully done, but is recommended only after careful, extensive planning and agreement by all parties involved including the public safety responders, the communications experts staffing the respective PSAPs, and technology experts who can guide the technological changes that would be needed. If the results of the study point toward consolidating in some fashion, then and only then should the HC offer be accepted.

### Recommendation:

That consolidating HCSO Dispatch and MECC be considered, but agreed to only after an extensive study is completed to answer the numerous questions such as are included in the following study excerpts. Those questions include (but are not limited to):

- Governance;
- Personnel/staffing;
- Costs/funding;
- Technology migration;
- Siting of the physical plant;
- Standard Operating Procedures and service levels;
- Support services (I.T., legal, HR, budgeting, training, etc.)

### **I. Documentation already delivered for November 10, 2004 PS&RS meeting:**

- Resolution
- Cover letter from Sandra Vargas
- Recommended Council Action request
- Position paper:
  - Included the resolution, a recommendation to do more due diligence before making a final decision, recommending that a quick partnership would not reap taxpayer benefits, suggested the prime issues were quality of service and cost, suggested “conditions” would be the presence of something akin to a joint powers agreement for governance and an examination of the protocols for acceptability.
  - Includes Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

- Includes description of the Anoka County governance of a consolidated approach to 9-1-1/dispatching services;
- Includes cites of legislation on the Hennepin County Sheriff's responsibility/authority to do public safety communications.

## **II. Considerations from the Minnesota Department of Public Safety Study on Public Safety Answering Points (PSAP) Consolidations (February 2004):**

(highlights are mine):

### **PUBLIC SAFETY CONCLUSIONS**

- 1) **Local public safety stakeholders interviewed by the study team who see themselves as the potential targets of consolidation (smaller county PSAPs in Greater Minnesota and smaller city PSAPs in the Twin Cities metro area) are intensely skeptical about any potential public safety benefits.** In fact, they strongly believe that consolidation will cause them to compromise public safety services. The concern and skepticism about consolidation by many local public safety officials, particularly sheriffs and dispatch supervisors in Greater Minnesota, cannot be overstated.
- 2) In consolidations, or in larger PSAPs that face many of the same challenges that a consolidated PSAP has, almost all of these concerns have been solvable through careful planning and implementation, or can potentially be offset by public safety benefits.
- 3) Just because these concerns **can** be solved does not mean that they **will** be solved, and in some instances, they have **not** been solved.
- 4) As such, while many of the concerns of local public safety officials can be successfully addressed in a skillfully planned and executed consolidation, these officials have reason to be skeptical that they **will** be successfully addressed.
- 5) **Accountability and responsibility concerns by the current local law enforcement operators of PSAP services should be taken seriously, listened to, and clearly spelled out in the governance structures and daily operations of PSAPs.** The study team found some instances where these accountability concerns were dismissed or criticized as "whining," "fear of change," "turf-fighting," and the like. Rather, these are legitimate management issues. While solvable, they need to be addressed.
- 6) The extent to which public safety will be impacted by consolidation depends substantially on the quality of the consolidation, and the extent to which potential problems are effectively handled. The study team found a few instances where the relationship between a consolidated PSAP operation and its dispatched services could be described as "tense," as well as operations where local agencies expended a lot of effort to work out their governance structures, roles and responsibilities, and day-to-day feedback mechanisms, and where relationships were more collegial. In practice, solving problems seems to go more smoothly when key local stakeholders, such as public safety officials, support the consolidation, and tends to go badly more often when there is considerable opposition.
- 7) **Overall, the study team finds that while the potential problems of consolidation and of larger PSAP operation are solvable and have**

been solved with good management and oversight, the intrinsic problems faced by smaller PSAPs, particularly one-person PSAPs, are more intractable. For instance, while it is possible for a consolidated PSAP to have superb geographic knowledge through training, databases, and mapping software, it is more difficult for a smaller PSAP to overcome the various difficulties of only having one dispatcher on duty (the risk of simultaneous public safety crises, the danger of the dispatcher falling victim to illness while on duty, the difficulties in offering tactical fire dispatching, etc.). However, operational specifics are very important. A loss in training, experience, geographic knowledge, and management quality, if this results from a poorly planned consolidation, could outweigh any public safety benefit of adding an additional person on duty at all times.

## MN MANAGEMENT ANALYSIS DIVISION RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) The study team concludes that PSAP consolidation is feasible in Minnesota, and has the potential to offer cost saving and/or public safety benefits when the circumstances are right. The study team recommends that PSAPs examine their operations to see if these circumstances exist, and if so, to consider consolidation as a means to save money and/or improve public safety. The circumstances that make a consolidation more feasible are where:
  - PSAP operating costs, per 911 call or per event dispatched, are relatively high when compared to larger PSAPs in the state (see Tables 2 and 3, on pages **Error! Bookmark not defined.** and **Error! Bookmark not defined.****Error! Reference source not found.** for comparisons with other PSAPs)
  - The PSAP is in need of capital upgrades that could be avoided through consolidation
  - Willing consolidation partners can be found in other PSAPs
  - Public safety agencies and other key stakeholders are willing participants in the consolidation, or are at least not hostile to the notion. One way to get the support of public safety agencies is to allow them to use all, or a substantial portion of, the savings from consolidation for other public safety needs
  - A satisfactory arrangement can be made regarding PSAP governance, accountability, service, standards, and control
  - A PSAP has only one dispatcher covering some or all shifts
  - The transition costs would be low relative to the potential for operating or capital cost savings
  - A feasibility study has verified the potential for operational, cost, or public safety benefits within the specific consolidation on the table. Such a feasibility study should investigate operational data, and determine the way PSAP resources are actually allocated, particularly in the smaller PSAPs where dispatchers commonly perform multiple duties and have their shifts occasionally covered by officers on a different budget
- 2) The study team recommends that the State of Minnesota **not** mandate or coerce PSAP consolidation. Although the study team has not had any indication that policymakers are considering this as an option, local PSAP stakeholders are concerned about state mandates. The study team sees several reasons why mandates would be a mistake:

- The likely success of PSAP consolidation, as well as the likelihood of cost savings, is highly contingent on local factors, such as working relationships, staffing, trust, and specific local service needs.
  - The functional and statutory responsibility for public safety rests with local government in Minnesota, and decisions about how to carry out that responsibility should be left to local government.
  - When state governments have tried to mandate consolidation there has been political backlash. In Oregon, for instance, the backlash resulted in the mandate being overturned. The study team's sense from its visits and focus groups across the state is that this is a very important issue for local public safety agencies, and a similar reaction to that in Oregon would be possible.
- 3) Any PSAP consolidation needs to be well-planned, and allow adequate resources for training and transition. This may seem obvious, but consolidations in Minnesota have occasionally been rushed, with insufficient training or planning.
- 4) In supplement to the PSAP Advisory Committee's recommendations of funding incentives, the study team recommends that funding incentives for consolidation, including feasibility studies and implementation grants, be structured around cost-savings and public safety, not consolidation as an end in itself. It is quite possible to have a consolidation that is a net financial loss and worsens public safety.

Examples of such funding incentives would be:

- Fund implementation grants for consolidation only after a feasibility study has shown potential gains in cost savings and/or public safety.
  - Fund items that would remove barriers to consolidation, such as radio and records managements systems (in our interviews, the potential consolidation or interfacing of record management systems was widely seen as a benefit even if PSAP consolidation never occurred as a result), etc.
- 5) The study team recommends that jurisdictions exploring consolidation consider a governance structure that includes representatives from the public safety agencies that use the services of the PSAP. Governance structure models that might be considered by PSAPs considering consolidation are those used by Anoka County and the Red River Dispatch Center in Fargo, ND.

### **PSAP Advisory Committee's Response to Recommendations**

Pursuant to the committee charge outlined earlier in the report, the PSAP Advisory Committee reviewed, discussed, and accepted the five recommendations identified above.

(end of excerpts from the MN DPS study report)

## **III. Considerations from the PSC Alliance, Inc. study report for all 10 cities with independent PSAPs in Hennepin County (Phase I):**

(highlights are mine)

### **BACKGROUND**

## Overview of the Project and its Genesis

The principle focus of this study has been to determine the feasibility, opportunities, and obstacles associated with:

- Creating a cluster - or clusters - of PSAP(s), that would serve some or all of the communities.
- Reorganizing and consolidating dispatch functions into existing PSAPs in Hennepin County driven by those cities expressing an interest in offering service to others.

The key question articulated for this study to address is: "Is it feasible to consolidate PSAP services to save money while maintaining acceptable levels of service?"

### Factors Bearing on the Problem

The driving force for these cities to explore the feasibility of consolidating dispatch services at this time is driven by multiple factors:

- Duplicate services provided across contiguous communities with significant overhead.
- Perceptions that in most suburban communities there is an inefficient use of human resources, particularly during non-peak time periods.
- Difficulties encountered by public safety management with maintaining adequate levels of trained personnel to deliver dispatch services.
- Lack of sufficient on-duty personnel in most suburban communities during peak loading periods creates unsafe conditions for field personnel and negatively affects service levels for the calling public.
- The speed, depth, and breadth of technological change and equipment obsolescence that requires ever higher levels of technical competency and staff focus, as well as more rapid, frequent, and comprehensive upgrading of hardware, software, and user skills.
- Aging infrastructure that in some communities has created dangerous levels of vulnerability: in some cases, radio equipment has simply ceased operating during events impacting both employee and citizen safety.

- Public and field personnel expectations continue to rise with time requiring improved selection and retention strategies, enhanced performance management, greater professionalism, more and better training. These requirements call for more specialized management focus and attention to the dispatch functions and related personnel.
- Pressures to professionalize the dispatch environment require greater awareness and diligence regarding measurement and improvement of performance. Often, this requires an investment in specialized equipment to capture call processing metrics and administrative personnel competent to understand and act upon the data.
- The need for greater inter-operability and ease of inter-agency communication by public safety agencies has enhanced their interest in participating in the 800 MHz Metro Radio system. This interest, when acted upon, has significant fiscal implications, both in capital and operating expenses, for agencies that choose to participate.
- Managing a professional dispatch operation is more challenging when some communities' loss of local government aid from the state jeopardizes their capacity to fund all capital and operating expenses at the levels needed.<sup>1</sup>

#### Fire Dispatching:

Several of the agencies identified MECC's fire dispatching as a good model for fire dispatch operations. Many of the fire agencies say they have grown to accept the level of service they get from their dispatch operation as expressed in this comment: "I have given up and have settled for a lower level of service."

The fire service users stated that they have had made many suggestions and have voiced their concerns many times, but report that nothing has changed.

We suggest that a key goal of any consolidated service delivery option should be to incorporate the voices of all users relative to ongoing policy direction, procedural issues, and level of service evaluations relating to PSAP operations. Regardless of any decision to consolidate or not, an opportunity exists for improved service to most, if not all, of the fire departments, albeit to differing degrees of improvement.

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1 The impact of budget varies in the different partnering communities.

## KEY QUESTION – CONSOLIDATION FEASIBILITY

### Acceptable Service with Appropriate Economy

The question of PSAP consolidation feasibility is one that requires a description of the context. Due to the previously discussed issues, fiscal pressures, and other factors bearing on the participating communities, we determined that it would be appropriate to identify key elements of what the question of “feasibility” relates to.

As discussed during progress meetings with the steering committee, with the technology available today, if all other subjective factors and local service considerations were of no consequence, any sort of dispatch consolidation would be “technically feasible”.

The question of feasibility, then, runs deeper than mere technology and must consider the environment within and around the communities, their elected and appointed officials, and other key stakeholders, including the employees and organized labor, as applicable.

#### Commitment to Consolidation

When large-scale transformation is undertaken in any organization, the true test of a participant’s engagement typically surfaces when a conflict occurs during implementation or in the full-fledged operational stage. It is at these “moments of truth” that commitment to the transformation must be solid and clearly articulated.

In a public-safety consolidated dispatch context, this means that the elected officials and appointed officials must be firmly and visibly committed to the journey.

Will mistakes occur? **Yes.**

Will compromise and consideration be relevant? **Without question.**

A clearly aligned and focused consolidated entity will be able to move through and past the inevitable “speed bumps” in implementation, provided it has the support of the member entities and a strong, focused leadership team.

## Efficiency vs. Effectiveness

Inevitably, in discussions of dispatch consolidation or any other large-scale organizational change, there is a point where the discussion begins to straddle the line between efficiency and effectiveness. This is yet another parameter that requires clarity in the purpose and strategic design of a new organization. The owners of a new consolidated dispatching operation must articulate their primary focus and their strategic drivers. At one extreme, efficiency is identified with least cost operations, while at the other extreme, effectiveness is identified with maximum impact, even at higher cost. Illustrations are contained in the "Community Snapshots" section of this report.

We chose not to position one perspective above another, but to advocate for clarification from the stake holders regarding these parameters . . . because this clarification will set the tone for investment strategies, technology positioning, compensation policy, and other relevant areas of the prospective business venture.

***We conclude that greater effectiveness and premier service can be achieved at reduced overall cost through purposeful consolidation.***

## The PSAP Mission

Regardless of jurisdiction, the primary mission of the PSAP dispatch operation is to receive and process citizen requests for service and relay/assign that information to appropriate response personnel in a fashion that is timely, accurate, and effective. To accomplish this mission, dispatch personnel use similar technologies and adapt the use of those technologies based upon localized protocols.

A secondary PSAP dispatch operations mission is to maintain accurate field unit status and record information associated with the processing of calls for service and field observed activity. Accurate record keeping is at the heart of the dispatcher's role but there is a fine and important distinction between record keeping and keeping the records.

***We submit that "best practices" and delivering the highest level of measurable service***

## should be fundamental objectives of consolidation.

### Other Comments

While not directly connected to the dispatch consolidation feasibility, we did note other opportunities for cooperation and task sharing that would likely provide improved service at reduced cost. In addition, we believe that some tasks that are handled infrequently need to be handled more often by a smaller group of employees, which would likely produce better proficiency, quality, and reliability.

Some examples that came up in the interviews and/or in our analysis conversations are:

- Bundling of technical public-safety services, like the processing of DUI arrests, booking of arrestees in hubs located in various police facilities, transportation of arrestees from police stations to the county jail facility(s)
- Central records management
- Aggregated fire inspection services
- Evidence technician functions

If the communities elect to pursue some level of dispatch consolidation, we would encourage them to also investigate other ancillary functions that would benefit from consolidation. We are not advocating that these other functions be offered by a consolidated dispatch operation, but are suggesting that active conversation among the communities relative to those other areas will prove fruitful and will drive final organizational, technical, and policy strategies.

### **GOVERNANCE: A Key Critical Success Factor**

If a consolidated dispatch operation were created, several representatives of the communities in the study have expressed a consensus for a separate communications entity governed by a formal joint powers agreement. Equal representation for all participating cities is a key component. Several contacts, almost all at the city manager level, suggested that the LOGIS governance model was a good one to consider. There was strong sentiment against being a

“customer” of another jurisdiction from some officials. However, several officials indicated that they would be comfortable as a “vendor-provider” to other jurisdictions.

Governance is so important to the group that the topic needs early buy-in, subsequent implementation discussion, and ultimate consensus from all parties. Many also suggested that a management structure that was separate from all participating jurisdictions and agencies was a fundamental critical success factor.

Beyond a joint powers agreement, a few city/county management officials mentioned the possibility of a separate governmental taxing entity/district as a possible long-term approach that may help “level the playing field” of double taxation for comparable services.

The Hennepin County Sheriff’s governance model is not viewed as a “best practice” by the participant cities, though some have had little or no “difficulty” with the sheriff’s operation or with their respective relationship with the sheriff in recent years. The rationale expressed by interviewees – fire and police alike - was that the agencies served by the Sheriff’s operation had no formal “ownership” or control over policies, procedures, options, personnel selection, technical plans, and other relevant topics. They further noted that while there is a limited means of input offered through the sheriff’s radio operational advisory committee, it does not provide the level of input, feedback, and problem resolution that they believe is important for their agency to have in a permanent relationship.

#### Creating an Emergency Communications Service District – Option 4

A fifth option for consideration would be for some number of jurisdictions to engage in an appropriate relationship for the expressed purpose of creating a special district to provide regional emergency

communications services. Such a district would be created pursuant to statute with taxing authority and a governance and management structure separate from any city or county accountability.

This approach would likely offer the least amount of fiscal governance by interested communities, because it would be capable of levying taxes to pay for its own budget. However, even if such a district were created, there would still be a requirement for participating “client” public safety entities to be afforded some level of operational governance or oversight.

Such a district could also be created in such a way that it would allow the special district to be created to handle a variety of other public safety functions beyond emergency communications including, but not limited to:

- regional fire services
- police services
- bundling of technical public-safety services, like the processing of DUI arrests, booking of arrestees, transportation of arrestees from police stations to the county jail facility(s)
- central records management
- aggregated fire inspection services
- evidence technician functions

Such a structure could utilize non-sworn, but specially trained persons to handle the technical or support services functions.

In some ways, this option would likely look and act like a hybrid between the “contract for services” and “joint powers” options noted above, but it would have broader authority to operate as an independent authority. Because it would require more preparation and development work, this approach may take longer to complete than the other methods, yet it may be prudent to begin with this solution in mind, using another method of governance as a conscious interim governance strategy.

## **Governance: Concluding Remarks**

Emergency communications can be effectively and reliably delivered by pursuing any one of the governance options noted. Further, there are combinations among the options noted above that could occur for different subsets of the participating study jurisdictions. A way to continue the discussion about governance may be to review the Agreement established under the mantle of the Hennepin Emergency Communications Organization (HECO) which was created as a joint powers entity to facilitate cooperation and to administer some 9-1-1 related funding activities. Our inquiry in this feasibility study identified that the HECO joint powers agreement remains in effect, though it has been dormant for many years. Participants should consider using HECO and the LOGIS model, as well as the various sample agreements that PSC Alliance already shared with participants during the study process, in an ongoing discussion regarding how contemporary PSAP governance needs might best be achieved.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS & NEXT STEPS**

The next step to affecting any of the scenarios described in this report is to reach some level of consensus that change is appropriate. Focused, dedicated leadership is essential to moving consolidation initiatives forward. Interested parties must identify areas of agreement, as well as areas of disagreement. The study communities must determine their level of interest and commitment to pursuing one or more of the models identified and, for those interested in moving ahead, an implementation project plan must be created.

### Mission Statement

A first step in establishing a consolidated communications system would be for local officials to reach consensus on a common mission statement.

We suggest that such a mission statement might include the following principles and we encourage local officials to

consider whether they can reach agreement on these principles as their deliberations move forward

*“The mission for this shared public safety communications organization is to provide quality, cost-effective communications services to the public and public safety personnel. This organization will strive to deliver this service utilizing the latest technology and qualified, carefully selected employees that are appropriately recruited, trained, and supervised.”*

If agreement can be reached on a mission statement, the next step would be to consider the policy issues set forth below:

Because employees are critical to the service delivery effort and make valuable contributions, employee pay, recognition, and advancement will receive appropriate consideration by the organization.

Cost of communications service delivery will be continually evaluated against the benefits and the needs of the citizens and public safety agencies.

Policies and procedures will be established cooperatively in an effort to accommodate the needs of the people and agencies served.

Efficient use of communications resources (e.g., telephone lines, equipment) is a fundamental value of the organization. Consequently, the organization will cooperate with others to make best use of these resources.

## **POLICY ISSUES**

We have framed selected policy matters below in the form of questions. By answering the questions, policy makers may begin to establish the necessary foundations to further advance consolidated dispatching.

- **Organizational structure:**
  - Who will be "in charge" during transition?
  - Will that change after start-up?
  - Who will oversee and insure management control?
  
  - Who will oversee and be responsible for facility construction?
  - Who will represent the "owners" to contractors?
  
  - How will funding contributions to include "seed" money be defined and assessed?
  
  - What fiscal controls and financial management system will be used?
  
  - Staffing - What personnel "system" will be used?
    - What personnel policies/procedures will apply?
    - How will pension/insurance considerations be handled?
    - What will become of incumbent staff?
    - What process will be used to conduct a job classification and task evaluation?
    - What pay ranges will be used?
  
    - How will bargaining units be impacted and what steps will be taken relating to current and future employees and how will labor relationships be handled in a new shared dispatch service environment?
  
  - What local policies and/or procedures will need to be modified?
    - Who will assume responsibility to train field users?
  
  - How will continuity of service be maintained?
  
  - Which local agencies, if any, will remain open for walk-in traffic?

- What changes will be required in non-emergency and/or administrative call-handling procedures?
- How will individual jail operations and shared records systems be reconciled? Could the option of a consolidated or satellite detention center be explored? Technical exploration will be needed to connect differing records systems.
- Who will take the initiative to insure that necessary legal agreements are brought before local officials, explained, and executed?
- Who will assume responsibility for any public information activities and what role will a consolidated dispatch facility play in public information dissemination?
- Where and how will back-up dispatch operations be provided?

(end of excerpts from the PSC Alliance, Inc study (Phase 1); dated January 15, 2004)

#### **IV. Considerations from the PSC Alliance, Inc. study report for the Cities of Brooklyn Center, Golden Valley, Richfield, and Saint Louis Park (Phase II):**

(during this study the HC offer became known and thus PSC also studied the HCSO)

(highlights are mine)

**Hennepin County Sheriff's Office (HCSO) Dispatch**

**Background:**

During the Phase 1 study of consolidation, much discussion took place regarding Hennepin County offering dispatch services to the study cities that had made that request. Brooklyn Center, Golden Valley, and St. Louis Park sent letters to Hennepin County requesting availability and cost figures for dispatch services for their respective communities.

At the conclusion of the first phase (January 23, 2004), Hennepin County Administration sent a letter to each of the three cities who requested consideration for dispatch services that they could join Sheriff's Radio for an annual cost of \$183,000 each, as well as a one-time capital outlay that could be paid over ten years. Much discussion took place among the members of the Phase 1 group about the disparity between the agencies currently handled by Sheriff's Radio for no charge and how new agencies now would be charged, including the annual capital outlay.

On July 22, 2004, Hennepin County reversed course and advised all communities currently operating an independent PSAP in the county, including the City of Minneapolis, that they could join the Sheriff's Radio dispatch system at no cost. The County further stated that they would make the required capital improvements to their PSAP at the County's expense as part of this new offer. The deadline for a decision from the various independent PSAP communities was set for November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2004. The county suggested that they would require roughly 12 months to integrate any communities that accepted its offer. Agencies would be added in the order in which they notified the county of their interest.

In its offer, the county stipulated that any community that accepted its offer would need to conform to the county's dispatch operational protocol and advised of other changes that would be required to join the system. One major change will require the agencies to switch to the county's mobile data system vacating suburban mobile access to the current LoGIS/Printrak system. All agencies that move to the county's system would also need to be 'Metro Radio' converted before dispatch can be switched.

It should be noted that representatives of the four Allied PSAP study group communities were surprised by the sudden change in the county's position as represented in its recent offer of free dispatch services. Since the original discussions following the offer of service for \$183,000 per year, no dialog has taken place between the county and the three cities that had requested service. The change in position must have been the result of work by county administration, the Hennepin County Board, and

the Sheriff's Office. While a generous offer on the part of the County, the proposal leaves many questions unanswered concerning levels of service delivery and the need for potential internal changes among the subscribing cities to take advantage of the 'free' service.

During this phase of the study, significant discussion took place among the users about how Sheriff's Radio operated, as well as its governance model. Most of the specific operational comments and issues that arose were openly acknowledged as 'anecdotal'.

With all of the cities in the study group facing the option of a 'free' 11<sup>th</sup> hour dispatch offer from the county, we felt it was important to gather more information about the operation of Sheriff's Radio. We quickly organized a 'sit-along' session at the HCSO PSAP, as was done at the incumbent PSAPs of the study group.

Arrangements were made with Hennepin Sheriff's Office Captain Rick Mulek for a four-hour observation shift on August 21, 2004. This observation did not include detailed technical inventories, but focused on operational and procedural items and how the Sheriff Radio PSAP operates compared to the individual PSAPs of the study agencies.

#### **Summary of Hennepin County Sheriff's Radio Dispatch:**

- 22 Law Enforcement agencies handled
- 20 Fire Department agencies handled
- County divided into North, East, and South sections. Radio, phone, and dispatch pods handle individual communities by section.
- CAD software runs on IBM AS400 and the MDC network is run by County (a CAD upgrade is in the design and proposal process)
- All agencies dispatched are operating using 800 MHz Metro Radio.
- UPS & Genset backup power
- Positron 911 premise equipment, leased and maintained by Qwest.
- 911 trunks for both wireless and land line calls are routed geographically to their corresponding dispatch pods
- Squads use the county's MDC software and/or MDT units
- Secure facility with cameras and gate control

- County maintains a backup PSAP at the Sheriff's Patrol garage in Brooklyn Park. The facility does not have 911 capabilities, but 911 calls roll over to seven-digit numbers when activated by Qwest. The staff drills and operates quarterly to confirm operation.
- Handles severe weather and siren activation countywide with a backup unit at M.E.C.C. in downtown Minneapolis.

### **HCSO Dispatch 'Sit-along' Shift Synopsis:**

8/21/04 Saturday – Hennepin County Sheriff's radio operates a central dispatch operation in Golden Valley at 9300 Naper Street near Hwy. 169. It shares the secure site with the county's radio shop, as well as equipment and a tower for the 800 MHz Metro Radio system.

The dispatchers on duty are divided into call-takers and radio 'Monitors'. The job of the Monitor is to maintain watch on the radio channel to answer any radio calls from field units. With all the units operating on the 800 MHz Metro Radio system, radio channels are now referred to as 'talk groups'.

Three clusters in the dispatch center divide the county geographically.

Hennepin North zone handles Brooklyn Park, Maple Grove, Champlin, Osseo, Dayton, Corcoran and the Sheriff's Patrol division.

Hennepin East handles Crystal, New Hope, Robbinsdale, and St. Anthony.

Hennepin South handles Deephaven, Excelsior, Plymouth, Orono, Minnetrista, Mound, Wayzata, Hennepin Parks, as well as all non-patrol HCSO divisions.

Hennepin North and Hennepin South pods are staffed with one radio 'monitor' and two call-takers. Hennepin East has a 'monitor', but only one call-taker. Adjacent to Hennepin East is the Fire dispatcher.

Minimum staffing from 11 A.M. until 3 A.M. is eight dispatchers with 9 – 10 being normal staffing. Between 3 A.M. and 11 A.M., minimum staffing is five dispatchers and a clerk. In the event of a storm or other large incident, dispatch staff is called back based on response time to the center. There is always a sworn Sheriff's deputy on duty as the dispatch supervisor.

Sheriff's Radio's operates as a modified stage 1 system. This means that when call-takers receive a Priority 1 or 2 call, the employee answering the phone call also broadcasts it on the radio to law enforcement, as well as page out of any Fire/EMS resources needed. Once the call is dispatched, the

geographically assigned radio 'monitor' handles all unit communications via radio and mobile data terminal.

For fire events, once the call-taker for that region pages the respective fire department, the event is handled during the remainder of the event by the fire dispatcher. If multiple fire events are happening concurrently, another position can handle the second incident, if needed. Fire events can also be moved off the main county fire radio talk group to tactical talk groups as needed to maintain a relatively clear "Fire Main" channel. Fire alerting is handled on several legacy VHF transmitters in the county to alert each agency's voice pagers.

There are three additional fully outfitted positions plus a training and supervisor position that can all be pressed into service for any large incident or event.

Standard 'event codes' are used in the CAD system. These are entered by the call-taker into CAD and the event codes specify the priority of the call/response, as well as the agency, unit recommendation(s), and any other agencies to send, such as fire, etc. This response information has been entered into the CAD based on response procedure information provided by each agency dispatched by Sheriff's Radio (this ability is similar to the capability of each of the three existing PSAPs in the study group with their existing CAD software, but the study communities underutilize this capability today).

CAD verifies that the address given by the caller and entered by the call-taker is valid and confirms to which agency the call is to be assigned. For 911 landline calls, this information can be pulled from the 911 address information presented to the call-taker. (this is also similar to the three existing PSAPs in the study group)

With the significant number of units utilizing the various radio channels/pods, radio traffic was observed to be very brief and succinct. Staff advised that they are trained to only transmit pertinent information to get law enforcement units dispatched and that the responding officer(s) are to pull up the detailed call information on their mobile data units. **This method depends upon the officer being in/near their car to get complete information about calls for service and would be an issue for the suburban police agencies involved in this Phase 2 study that use motorcycle, bicycle, or foot patrol.** It also assumes that each data transmission is received and sent without technical difficulties.

For each sector of the county on a weekend evening, there can be as many as 30 – 50 units logged on and handled by a dispatcher. Based upon our experience this is a very high unit-to-dispatcher ratio. During our sit-along session, there were

150 units logged into the CAD system being dispatched by Sheriff's Radio.

Staff advised there is no way to be geographically familiar with all the areas of Hennepin County they handle. Investigators, warrant cars, and patrol units from the county also enter jurisdictions not dispatched by Sheriff's Radio. Dispatch staff relies on the geo-coding of addresses in CAD, as well as a common-name index, to pinpoint locations for the cities they serve.

Dispatch staff work at any and all of the geographic sectors handled by Sheriff's Radio. Staff signs up 'first come/first serve' for their geographic and functional assignments for each shift. There are not assigned geographic sectors, so staff must be flexible enough to handle any sector. There is a requirement for a minimum number of shifts worked as the 'monitor' dispatcher, however, and this most likely ensures equity, as well as maintenance of skills.

During the observation period, staff described the call load as fairly light. Several medical calls came in for various agencies, as well as routine calls, such as loud music, possible drunk driver, restraining order violation, and several field-initiated traffic stops reported via mobile data terminal. In the middle of the observation period, a St. Anthony police unit handled by the Hennepin East cluster initiated a foot chase.

## HCSO Key Observations:

1. **Compared to the individual PSAPs observed, there is virtually no communications between dispatch and field units except initial call assignment, pertinent call updates, and status checks when needed.**

HCSO staff advised that a significant amount of "officer to officer" communications takes place on each agency's "car-to-car" talk group in that city. All status changes (arrival, available, etc.), as well as call ending dispositions, are done on the MDC units which update the screen on the CAD in Dispatch, again assuming that all data transmissions are sent and received without technical problems.

2. Per the county's radio protocol, traffic stops are rarely aired on the radio. Supervisory staff explained that unless the officer feels the traffic stop is in some way out of the ordinary or dangerous, they are to type their traffic stops on their MDC and **not** air it on the radio (Dispatch staff stated that some field units do air their stops on their city's "car-to-car" channel to advise other field units in their agency.) If the traffic stop is not aired on either the county channel or the "car-to-car" channel in the agency, other officers would only be aware if they checked their MDC screen and saw the event. **While we believe that radio traffic can become too "chatty" if undisciplined, we believe that the practice of not airing traffic stops on the radio is counter-productive, potentially unsafe, and, from our experience and that of our clients, is inconsistent with commonly observed police training procedures.**

3. **Having agencies switching between their Hennepin Main talk group and their agency's car-to-car talk group can leave dispatchers out of the loop** for important information as it unfolds during an event. Examples were given by dispatchers where a unit returned to the main dispatch channel requesting urgent assistance and dispatch had no idea what was going on or where the unit needed help.

4. Dispatch supervisory staff advises that dispatchers never screen calls to decide if an officer in an agency needs to be sent the call. This protocol is different than what is used in the now autonomous PSAP model used in Brooklyn Center, Golden Valley/St. Louis Park, and Richfield. At HCSO, calls for service are quickly assigned to a field unit while some situations or requests for information, such as to clarify a

local ordinance, are relayed to a field unit along with a phone message to call the reporting party back. Our observation is that many calls that are currently handled by local dispatchers and cleared on the phone are passed on or assigned to either law enforcement or fire units in the HCSO model.

Shifting call processing for the four study communities to HCSO would increase the number of calls that the field units have to deal with, because the County's dispatch model doesn't provide that level of service.

5. HCSO dispatchers appeared to be well-trained and followed operations protocols in a consistent manner. At the same time, the dispatchers appear to have little discretion in processing information they receive. Their training regimen calls for six months of training before a dispatcher is allowed to work a position on their own. All dispatchers interviewed said that they enjoyed working at Sheriff's Radio.
6. The St. Anthony Fire Department is the only full-time fire department dispatched by Sheriff's Radio. The other 19 fire departments that are dispatched by HCSO are "paid on-call" departments.
7. When asked if agencies make significant use of their "car-to-car" tactical channels, HCSO staff stated that the agencies did and, then, provided examples citing times where officers had suspects at gun point and dispatch wasn't aware of the incident, because field units hadn't advised dispatch on the main channel. Information gaps/losses occur when agencies operate on consolidated talk groups that are not monitored in the PSAP. HCSO's policy of strictly regulating the radio traffic on the primary dispatch zones creates a bifurcated communications system that has given birth to "work- arounds" in the field.
8. Sheriff's Radio has a unique and effective mixture of call-taker and radio dispatcher. Having geographic clusters where both radio and phone lines appear for that region allows smaller, more efficient teams. This is fairly similar to the three existing PSAPs in the study group. The difference is that the "dispatch to field unit" ratio at HCSO dispatch is 1 dispatcher to between 30 and 50 units, whereas individual PSAPs are generally around 1 to 10. While we believe there are opportunities for greater unit-to-dispatcher efficiency than currently exists in the autonomous

PSAPs, we think the ratio in place at HCSO dispatch is both undesirable and a safety risk.

9. Unlike a full two-stage dispatch operation, such as Minneapolis, where call-takers and dispatchers are not seated immediately adjacent within geographic clusters, the clusters at HCSO allow call-takers to have both verbal and non-verbal cueing, as well as assisting each other with other call tasks. This appeared to be both efficient and effective.
10. Economies of scale at HCSO allow call-takers from other geographic clusters to assist in answering calls if another zone in the county is being overloaded. Any call-taker or dispatcher position can enter and handle calls for any other zone in the county.
11. HCSO dispatch does an excellent job checking the status of officers out on traffic stops and other calls depending on the nature code entered and the use of CAD timers that alert dispatchers that a standard time period has expired. Once checked on, officers can have dispatch reset a timer for their next status check. Agencies have loaded timer information into CAD for dispatch to use as a "starting point".
12. Fire agencies are faxed a CAD event info summary directly to their stations after the close of the incident. No paper information is provided to the stations upon activation of the call. Fire alerting/notification procedures are primarily organized around departments that are staffed with volunteers.
13. With the large number of agencies handled by Sheriff's Radio, varied procedures across all user agencies would create significant difficulty for dispatch staff and operations. Supervisory staff explained that when agencies join, the agencies provide information to front load the CAD for their specific requests for event response, as well as priority levels for the various types of calls. Agencies are then advised how the calls will be dispatched pursuant to the uniform dispatch procedures at HCSO.
14. Information files are loaded into CAD to assist dispatchers with any community-specific information, as well as phone numbers, etc. There are currently over 150 info files for staff to access in the center.

#### **HCSO Summary:**

Sheriff's Radio operates a well-trained, professional PSAP. The mixture of Stage 1 and Stage 2 dispatch operation allows staff synergy and flexibility, while maintaining constant watch on radio traffic by using a 'monitor' for each geographic area. Call-takers 'airing' priority 1 and 2 calls, as well as paging out the fire

events, allows for quick dispatching by the person who actually talked to the caller.

The large number and varied sizes of agencies, as well as the significant number of field units being managed by each pod, affects the ability of dispatch staff to gain both geographic and field personnel knowledge for each city. CAD and effective front-loading of accurate information is the only way that staff are able to operate at the level that they do. Channel-loading and the breadth of that loading also prevents dispatchers from performing any significant pro-active assistance to the responding or on-the-scene units, though it is also prohibited from doing so by the protocols, policies, and procedures at county dispatch.

Because of the substantial number, range in size, and varied "personalities" of the agencies served, HCSO has advised their client agencies that each must adopt the county's dispatch and radio protocols including the county's standard procedures. In most instances, local policing styles and response procedures have been directly affected and modified by the limiting dispatch procedures and protocols.

**Officer call load will increase for an agency when joining the Sheriff's Radio system.** Calls that may have been able to be fielded by dispatchers more familiar with the local agency and/or allowed to be handled on the phone, will be dispatched or assigned to field officers to handle. This approach seems to undermine the philosophy that dispatch staff is an integral part of the public safety team. Empowering dispatch staff to assist in the agency's mission raises the level of service agencies can offer to their constituents. It is understood that incorporating this at a large scale/multi-agency consolidated PSAP can be difficult, but certainly not impossible. **We are aware of other large scale consolidated dispatch centers that provide significantly more 'personalized' local service than that now provided by Sheriff's Radio.**

Agencies that join Sheriff's Radio are assigned to one of the existing three geographic zones, each with its own radio "talk group". This arrangement has and will obviously change dispatch-to-unit and unit-to-unit operations. It is unknown if any other geographic new clusters would be added if a small number of agencies joined HCSO Dispatch during this 'open enrollment' period. If more than one agency were to accept the offer, however, loading of the channels could be clearly impacted and an additional cluster may likely need to be added. If that were to occur, the county has suggested that additional building and infrastructure expansion would likely be required. Sheriff's Radio staff advised that there currently is space within the existing facility for one additional cluster to be added without

changing the footprint of the facility. Depending on the number and mix of agencies that might accept the county's offer for free dispatch services, the need for building expansion is a definite possibility. While we did not study the capacity of the Sheriff's center, we believe that there is likely enough capacity with the addition of one more cluster, to dispatch two or perhaps three additional small communities provided that the same dispatch protocols are used as are now in effect.

The number of units monitored by each geographic cluster is a concern. Similar to teacher/student ratios in the classroom, monitoring and dispatching activity for 30 – 50 field units significantly reduces the ability of PSAP staff to provide any individual, specific assistance when it may be needed. From our experience, a single dispatcher can realistically handle a maximum of 20-30 deployable field units under their control. The trickle down of having many agencies and units on one channel has allowed "work arounds" to spring up, and units spending the majority of their radio time on individual tactical talk groups is, but one of these work arounds. Because these talk groups are not being monitored in dispatch, the dispatcher is missing potentially vital operational communications between field units. There should be a more optimal and manageable ratio between dispatcher and field units to assure that greater individual assistance can be given.

#### **Brooklyn Park Phone Interview – HCSO Dispatch Service:**

Many of the previously described observations of Hennepin County Sheriff's Radio were made from only the PSAP side of the relationship between dispatch and field units. In order to answer some questions about how field units may view their relationship with Sheriff's Radio, we conducted a phone interview with supervisory staff from the Brooklyn Park Police Department.

"Car-to-car" Operations – When asked about our observation that tactical operations must be happening on another channel, staff advised that a significant amount of conversation takes place within the Brooklyn Park "car-to-car" talk group. We were advised that this practice leaves the dispatcher out of any event information following assignment; it also prevents units operating on the "car-to-car" channel from hearing dispatch. No individual car-to-car talk groups are monitored or recorded at Sheriff's Radio or recorded at the user agencies. This practice also raises potential liability exposure if the channels are not properly recorded. The current configuration programmed into the field unit radios prioritizes to the channel they are selected.

If dispatch has an update or other information, field units operating on the local "car-to-car" channel may miss the transmission.

Traffic Stops – Brooklyn Park staff confirmed that they have been instructed that field units are not to call out their traffic stops on the radio, but only enter them on their squad MDT radio. In Brooklyn Park, field units regularly switch to the "car-to-car" talk group to air their location so that other field units are aware. This is a work-around created and used to bypass the procedure imposed by Sheriff's Radio. This requires field officers to also act as radio monitors for fellow officers where, in existing PSAPs, dispatchers perform that duty.

**Resource Starving - To counter the Sheriff's Radio comment regarding the economies of scale reached in their center for peak events, BPPD staff advised that excess capacity is better expressed as reallocation.**

The example given was when any weather event moves into the county, west side agencies/residents are typically impacted first. The ability of the other geographic clusters in the PSAP to assist west side storm issues is realistically at the expense of the non-involved geographic areas in the eastern side of the county. During these situations, we were told that it is not uncommon for Brooklyn Park's residents and field units to experience difficulty in connecting with dispatch because the focus is on the event in another geographic area of the county. It is understood that the major incident is able to get more of the needed dispatch resources, but that is not comforting to residents calling with routine calls for service in other areas of the county.

Call unloading/assigning – BPPD staff also advised that calls are regularly dispatched or phone numbers sent to officers for "call backs" regarding issues that could probably be handled by a dispatcher with more knowledge of, or tools for, the agencies they dispatch. Call volumes do increase for field units when dispatch isn't allowed and/or trained to help screen calls satisfactorily for callers. **Brooklyn Park staff opined that Sheriff's Radio is more of a "call announcing" service rather than a true dispatch service using a partnership model.**

CAD/MDC drawbacks - When supervisory staff at Brooklyn Park heard about the tools and capabilities that other agencies currently have access to in their squads, they advised that most of the tools described were unavailable when using the Hennepin County mobile data equipment network. Current County MDT users cannot:

- o obtain local record checks
- o access the internet for drivers' license pictures

- use the mobile equipment for field report writing,
- access call histories as these functional services are not available in the current county MDT/MDC system.

All of these functions are available and in daily use in the four study communities as a result of their use of the LoGIS/Printrak system. While there are some MDC performance issues for field staff using the LoGIS connected MDC devices, users demonstrated a heavy reliance on the available capabilities of that system.

We have been informed that the county's MDC network will be updated when the county proceeds with their CAD upgrade at some point in the future. However, with the steps that the county has already taken, there will not be built-in functionality for accessing local RMS systems, particularly for those who are LoGIS communities, as it is being specified as a free-standing architecture without connectivity to LoGIS' RMS capabilities.

Policing Style Policy Issues - Brooklyn Park PD staff also informed us that their policing style was affected by the County's level of service and the procedures used by county dispatch. Because they have been dispatched by the county for decades, they really don't know any other level of service, except what they hear from their neighboring agencies that have remained independent or are dispatched by a community other than the county.

Agency Disparity – Brooklyn Park stated that there is a perceived disparity between how any division of the Sheriff's Office is dispatched versus other user agencies. For example, there is a perception that HCSO field units are not held to the same strict interpretation of the procedures in place for what gets aired on the radio. BPPD staff feels that HCSO delivers a higher level of service to its internal divisions than it does to its client agencies. Examples were provided to illustrate that call types and dispositions normally required as MDT/MDC traffic, are routinely aired by Sheriff's Office personnel. BPPD felt that these reported deviations in protocol and procedure would not be acceptable if done by any non-sheriff agency, and, in fact, non-county agencies have been advised when "non-compliant" radio traffic was aired by one or more of their units.

Workable Solution – Brooklyn Park staff acknowledged that being dispatched by Sheriff's Radio does meet the basic requirement of getting the "calls for service" sent out. They also stated that: "people aren't dying because of who's dispatching."

They clearly explained that they have adapted to the service level provided and are able to work with it.

By knowing the limitation of the service, they have adapted their policing style and policies to handle it.

They have many issues that they have brought to the HCSO Communications Division about how county dispatch operates, but they report little or no resolution. BPPD staff echoed what we heard from agency heads of the four cities in the study group; that is: "they could make being dispatched by Hennepin County work, but it would not be their first choice. If they were forced to go with the county, other areas of their local operation would need to be modified or backfilled."

### **HCSO Summary:**

Brooklyn Park's contacts articulated many issues and examples of items that are a concern to their public safety operations staff. Many of their issues and/or concerns had to do with the lack of a meaningful process to influence or modify the county's dispatch operations and procedures. They understand how a large countywide dispatch system becomes homogenous due to the breadth of the agencies handled, but believe that some changes could be made to better provide for the varying needs of the user agencies.

The county's prohibition against airing all traffic stops on the radio is the biggest concern of the BPPD officers, and by implication, this extends to other user agencies, as well.

The other issue pointed out was the increased workload for field officers, because dispatch sends all calls to the field instead of helping screen calls and redirecting them as needed.

"Bad guys are being arrested and fires are being put out" is how staff articulates the current situation. Elected officials and the public probably do not know, and likely wouldn't fully understand, the issues faced by agencies that are dispatched by the county.

BPPD staff acknowledged that dispatch is handled professionally and consistently by the county, but believe that changes could be made to better provide for the needs of individual agencies.

### **FINANCE – SUMMARY**

The cities involved in this study are all first ring suburbs of Minneapolis and do not have infinite sources of revenue to continue to pay for their a local, autonomous PSAP/ dispatch center into the indefinite future. For the various reasons that have been articulated in this report, we believe that the best option for the four cities is to consolidate their dispatch

operations, preserving and enhancing their desired high levels of service and quality. They will be making an investment that will pay for itself over a relatively short space of time and it will provide access to system upgrades, new technology, and a better trained workforce at today's prices. This option will also act as a mitigation strategy relative to local fiscal pressures that will likely increase over time.

The "no cost" option of being dispatched by the Hennepin County Sheriff's Office is, first of all, not truly free. There are costs that each of the four communities would bear to make the transition to the county system. Secondly, the four cities would essentially "pay" in level of capabilities, because they would be required to migrate backward in both technology and level of service.

(end of excerpts from the PSC Alliance, Inc. study (Phase II); dated September 19, 2004)

**END (JED; 11/15/04)**