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Existing Conditions Technical Memorandum

Overview

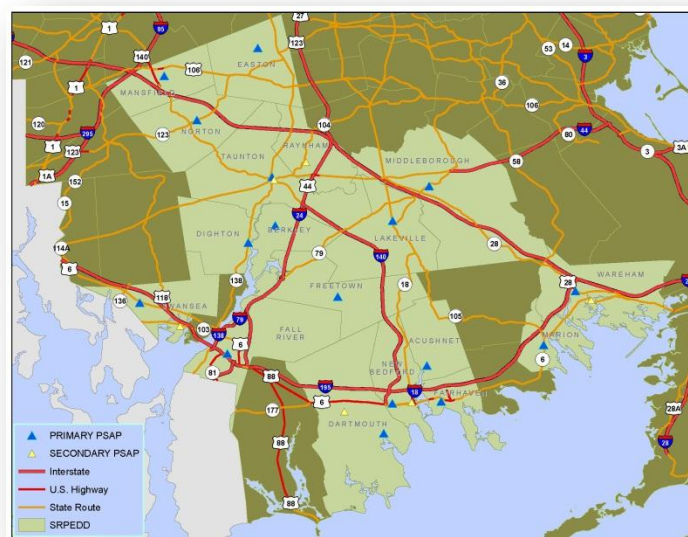
GeoComm is proud to partner with participating members of the Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District (SRPEDD) community to develop this Existing Conditions Technical Memorandum (Memorandum). This Memorandum provides:

- Snapshot of the current operations of 9-1-1 emergency communications in each of the member jurisdictions
- Geographic Information System (GIS) public safety analysis
- Occupational Analysis that reports the existing conditions related to training.

The GeoComm 16 member project team has spent many hours collecting data, observing operations and interviewing the various stakeholders for each of the Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) represented in the study. The information gathered during this phase of the Southeast Region 9-1-1 Dispatch Feasibility Study (Study) is not only reflected in this Memorandum but also will serve as a baseline for the analysis and recommendations that will be presented in future reports.

SRPEDD Region Overview

The region includes 27 cities and towns in Southeastern Massachusetts. The region is a mix of urban, suburban, and rural areas and has a total population of over 600,000 in 808 square miles.¹ Of those 27 cities and towns, there are 18 cities and towns and one university participating in the Southeast Region 9-1-1 Dispatch Feasibility Study.



¹ <http://www.srpedd.org/>



The 18 cities and towns and one university include:

City of Fall River	Town of Lakeville
City of New Bedford	Town of Mansfield
City of Taunton	Town of Marion
Town of Acushnet	Town of Middleborough
Town of Berkley	Town of Norton
Town of Dartmouth	Town of Raynham
Town of Dighton	Town of Swansea
Town of Easton	Town of Wareham
Town of Fairhaven	University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth Campus
Town of Freetown	

Assessment of Existing Conditions for PSAP Agencies

GeoComm used several approaches to collect the information required to make a thorough review of existing operations as well as to develop a baseline for future analysis. GeoComm appreciates the patience of the stakeholders during the observation and data gathering period. We understand it is a time consuming piece of the project for stakeholders, but it has provided valuable data that necessary in order to explore and provide options to the region.

The PSAP overviews or “snapshots” included in the Memorandum are based first on the data provided by the participating agency, second on the interviews and observations during the site visits, and third on the information provided by the Massachusetts State 9-1-1 Department. The snapshots are intended to describe an objective overview of current operations as well as comparison to Massachusetts 9-1-1 Department standards (Appendix A).

Data Collection and Interview Process

The process that GeoComm used to collect the information included in each PSAP snapshots within this Memorandum was thorough and involved multiple stakeholders from executive management to technicians. It included data collection tools (Appendix B), interviews, and observations, and the process included the following steps:

- Initial Data Collections Tool
- Dispatch Center Interviews and Observations
- Executive Management Interviews
- Technology/Radio Interviews



Initial Data Collection Tool

After GeoComm's introductory conference call with members of the 9-1-1 Steering Committee and after receiving contact information for each of the participating jurisdictions, GeoComm sent an initial correspondence package to each of the PSAP jurisdictions. This correspondence introduced GeoComm as the partner selected for the study and provided background on the project scope and purpose. The package included an Initial Data Collection Tool for each PSAP jurisdiction intended to provide basic PSAP information for GeoComm team prior to the first site visit. The information collected helped the GeoComm consultants have a basic understanding of the operations prior to the on-site meetings.

The information that was requested in the Initial Data Collection Tool included basic data such as:

- Types and number of calls received and dispatched
- Types and number of dispatch equipment utilized
- List of agencies for which dispatch services are provided
- List of non-call taking or dispatch duties assigned to PSAP staff
- Volumes of emergency and non-emergency calls received, incidents and calls for service and database statistics
- Staffing information

In addition to the statistical data, GeoComm requested documentation that will assist in analyzing each jurisdiction's potential for combining or consolidating emergency communications services. The documents requested included copies of union contracts, personnel policies, retirement plans, training program overview, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), budgets, and copies of any dispatching agreements with other jurisdictions.

GeoComm requested the participants to complete the tool and provide the data and documentation prior to the Project Initiation Meeting, January 25, 2011. Some of the data was provided prior to the meeting and some was provided during the site visits with each of the PSAPs. The data collected from this instrument and the follow-up interviews and observations will be used throughout this project and is crucial to GeoComm providing study participants with the most objective reports and recommendations possible.

Dispatch Center Interviews and Observations

In addition to the initial data collection, members of the GeoComm team conducted on-site interviews and observations at each of the Primary and Secondary PSAPs. During the meetings, GeoComm was able to clarify some of the information that it had received as well as close the gaps on some of the outstanding information. The interviewees included civilian and non-civilian dispatchers, management personnel, and emergency responders.



The goals of the interviews were to explore relevant issues pertaining to operational procedures, staffing, supervision, retention, training, development and scheduling. GeoComm also sought to gain a perspective from the responders with regards to current services and desires for future improvements.

In addition to the interviews, GeoComm spent time observing the existing PSAP operations, seeking to clarify or enhance the information already collected. Consultants were also able to observe the communications personnel jobs and tasks procedures.

During the site visits, GeoComm was able to get a better understanding of the 9-1-1 network, existing equipment and building facilities, management, supervision, and personnel structures.

Executive Management Interviews

Consultants from the GeoComm project team interviewed each Police and Fire Chief whose departments were part of the Primary or Secondary PSAP operations. For some communities, Deputy Chiefs or other command staff participated in the interviews and in other cases town or city management participated.

The purpose of these interviews was to understand the goals of the departments with regards to communications and identify the high level political, governance, and control, financial and other significant issues that would need to be addressed and resolved before the executive leadership would seriously consider changes to existing organizational structure with regards to emergency communications.

Some of the questions asked include:

- What is the chief's perception of the current structure, operations, and quality of service provided by the PSAP(s)?
- What is the Chief's perception of the current training program and the quality of training?
- What is the Chief's view on PSAP Consolidation or Regionalization in any form?
- What elements must be solved to the agency's satisfaction in order to support a recommendation for PSAP consolidation? What would be the biggest obstacle for the agency?
- What would be the Human Resources impact on the agency should emergency communications be moved elsewhere along with the state financial support?

The responses from the interviews are not included in the PSAP profiles but will be used by the GeoComm team as it analyzes regionalization and/or consolidation opportunities. It is important to report, however, that there were several consistent themes discussed by the executive management in the interviews. Some of those interviewed were more open to change than others and all interviewed had several critical success factors that need to be resolved before they will support a recommendation for change. GeoComm also noted that the communities have unique issues that must be addressed. The themes, critical success factors, and unique issues must be addressed by the GeoComm team as it evaluates potential changes in PSAP operations for each participant.



The Police Chief interviews led to the following consistent themes and critical success factors:

- Any change must produce a documented improvement in public safety
- Any change must address local officer safety
- Any change must provide for the value of “critical local knowledge”
- Any change must address the local command and control concerns
- Any change must be evaluated in light of the fiscal impact on local agencies, which have already had budget cuts
- Any change must seek to effectively address the concerns of existing staff
- Any change must include the availability of immediate assistance 24/7 at current facilities
- Any change may best be accomplished utilizing small groups of agencies rather than one large entity
- Any change must include appropriate access control and security of current facilities
- Any changes must identify how collateral duties now performed primarily by “dispatchers” will be accomplished
- Any change should address the probable costs to the community for providing such services in the absence of the “dispatch function” locally

The Fire Chief Interviews led to the following consistent themes and critical success factors:

- Any change should include uniformed firefighters as Fire dispatchers
- Any change in Fire dispatch must adhere to national standards
- Any change cannot affect existing staffing levels
- Any change should provide Fire dispatch operations access to state 9-1-1 funding
- Any change must provide for the value of “critical local knowledge”
- Any change must provide for quicker dispatch information to the Fire Departments
- Any change must support an improvement in service
- Any change will have to overcome significant local political issues and existing labor agreements

Technology/Radio Interviews

While some GeoComm team members were interviewing executive management and PSAP staff, the GeoComm Technical and Operational team members conducted an inventory of the existing radio technology at each PSAP. The team met with agency staff and service providers to assess the current and future technology plans and opportunities that may impact consolidation feasibility considerations. In addition to the basic information reported in the PSAP snapshots, GeoComm will utilize the information received in these interviews as a baseline for any radio system configuration recommendations.



GIS Data Analysis

Also included in the Existing Conditions Technical Memorandum is an analysis of the GIS systems currently used in the PSAPs involved in the study. It focuses on the synchronization of the data components related to accurately locating the origin of a 9-1-1 call. This analysis will provide valuable information to PSAP organizations as they consider migration to Next Generation 9-1-1 (NG9-1-1).

GeoComm worked closely with the Massachusetts Office of Geographic Information (MassGIS), the agency that provides the map data to the State 9-1-1 Department, to be utilized in all of the state's PSAPs. GeoComm analyzed the GIS, Master Street Address Guide (MSAG), and Automatic Location Information (ALI) data for the Cities of Fall River and Taunton and the Towns of Fairhaven, Mansfield, and Raynham. The results of the GIS and related database components are compiled in the GIS Data Report Card.

Occupational Analysis and Training Report

Included in each of the PSAP snapshots is a section that provides an overview of the call taker and dispatcher training requirements and support for the agency. The snapshots include the current training program as compared to existing Massachusetts State 9-1-1 Department standards and the local training requirements. The report also discusses the agencies current status with regards to Emergency Medical Dispatch (EMD), which will soon be a requirement by the state.

In addition to the training overview provided in each PSAP snapshot document, this Memorandum provides additional training information gathered during a series of workshops with dispatchers. GeoComm scheduled three training workshops for 9-1-1 and PSAP personnel as well as 9-1-1 and PSAP communications trainers. The workshops assisted in the identification of current training requirements and standards and identified areas for training enhancement in the future.

Supplemental Information

One of the most important components of emergency communication services in the SRPEED region is the role that the Massachusetts State 9-1-1 Department plays in the provision of PSAPs and related services. GeoComm met with the Massachusetts State 9-1-1 Department executive staff to get better understanding of the department's existing services and its plans for the provision of Next Generation 9-1-1 Services.

The staff was extremely gracious and helpful to the GeoComm team. GeoComm was provided important information to utilize and consider as the team moves forward with additional analysis and the formulation of recommendations.

During the meeting, GeoComm noted that the state either provides or plans to provide the following to Primary PSAPs in Massachusetts:



- The Massachusetts State 9-1-1 Department does fund both the Non-Recurring Charges (NRC) and Monthly Recurring Charges (MRC) for the elements of the system which they provide.
Grants are provided annually based on population and may be used for a variety of approved purposes, including equipment, personnel, and training.
- The state has set aside incentive and development grants that will provide additional financial assistance for PSAP agencies that combine operations. Chapter 223 of the Acts of 2008 states “The State 9-1-1 Department shall develop and administer grant programs to assist PSAPs and regional emergency communication centers in providing enhanced 9-1-1 service and to foster the development of regional PSAPs, regional secondary PSAPs, and regional emergency communication centers”
- The state is in the rulemaking process for increased training requirements for 9-1-1 call takers
- The state plans to begin the procurement process for a statewide Next Generation 9-1-1 network during the second quarter of 2011
- The state will begin the implementation of the NG 9-1-1 system in 2012 with completion in 2013

It is important that GeoComm understands the timeline for the migration to NG9-1-1 as it formulates recommendations for the community participants in the study. It is also beneficial for GeoComm to have a full understanding of funding provided by the state for PSAP operations and how that funding for local jurisdictions will be impacted by decisions that participants in the study make regarding their options for consolidation.

Concluding Remarks

GeoComm is proud to provide participants in the Southeast Region 9-1-1 Feasibility Study a Task A draft report: Existing Conditions Technical Memorandum. The Memorandum provides a snapshot of the existing operation at each of the PSAPs involved in the study, an Occupational Analysis and Training Report, and a GIS Data Report Card. All of these reports, along with the state and regional knowledge that was gleaned during the process will provide the baseline of information that will be used as the GeoComm team begins to analyze the similarities and differences of each operation.

The next phase of information gathering is to seek input from the general public and the municipal management and governance leadership of the members. GeoComm will be in the SRPEDD region in April to conduct public meetings to understand the perspectives of these very important stakeholders. We realize that the consolidation of local emergency communication services, or other services for that matter, can be a very sensitive and controversial subject to discuss. It is important that GeoComm understands the perspectives from the citizens who depend on those services for the safety of lives and property as well as those from the governing bodies responsible for the provision of those services to their citizens.



The input from these meetings, along with the data included in this Memorandum will be considered as GeoComm formulates the feasibility assessment and financial analysis that will be presented to the steering committee in May. Even though the Existing Conditions Technical Memorandum is only the first phase of the study, it provides the foundation for future analysis and recommendations.

It is imperative that GeoComm utilize the most complete and accurate data available to formulate its reports and recommendations. As GeoComm moves forward with its analysis, we may find gaps in the information provided to date and will follow-up with the contacts at specific PSAPs to fill those gaps. The requests for additional or clarifying information will be specific to the affected agencies. GeoComm thanks all the Police and Fire Chiefs, Dispatchers, Massachusetts State 9-1-1 Department executive staff, and members of the 9-1-1 Steering Committee for their assistance in gathering the information provided in this Memorandum.

