

4

CENTRAL EMERGENCY DISPATCH SERVICES UPDATE

The Finance and Administration Committee recommends:

- 1. the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, September 11, 2008, from the Chief Administrative Officer; and**
- 2. staff report back to the Committee in 2009 when the comprehensive feasibility study of “905” EMS providers is completed.**

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. This report be shared with local municipalities and local municipal fire services for their information.

2. PURPOSE

At the June 5, 2008 Finance and Administration Committee staff were directed to provide an update on the provision of central dispatch services.

3. BACKGROUND

Centralized 911 dispatch services has been an issue for years in York Region

Centralized dispatch services for 911 emergencies in York Region has been a topic of Council debate and discussion for at least the last 15 years. Originally this discussion focused on joint 911 operations for York Regional Police and local municipal fire services, and has expanded to include York Region Emergency Medical Services (EMS) since their addition to the Region’s responsibilities in 2000.

On May 19, 2005, York Regional Council opted to cease further action on a proposed centralized fire communication service due to labour constraints contained in the *Fire Protection and Prevention Act (FPPA)*. Council requested the Province to make legislative changes necessary to allow the Region to proceed with this joint communication service, but these attempts were met with resistance from the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Ultimately, Council could not pursue the joint dispatch concept. However, agreements between York Regional Police and local municipal fire services to share radio infrastructure did proceed.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

York Region EMS dispatch services continue to be owned and operated by the Province

York Region EMS land ambulance dispatch operations continue to be under control of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC). The Province's EMS dispatch services for York Region are run out of a centralized site in Barrie.

In late 2002, the City of Ottawa became the first contract provider to operate dispatch services following the downloading of land ambulance services to upper tier municipalities. The terms of the Ottawa contract limited any system changes to the established MOHLTC scope and design. Although the City of Ottawa successfully transferred provincially-owned dispatch services to their local EMS service and operational and administrative efficiencies were achieved, no significant impacts on ambulance response times have been realized.

In 2004, Niagara Region also negotiated a contract with the MOHLTC to operate ambulance dispatch. Unlike the City of Ottawa, Niagara Region was granted authority to redesign the dispatch operation to leverage the latest in technology and best practices. Niagara Region has been able to achieve improvements in response time reliability and call processing proficiency. Based on OMBI results, Niagara Region has the lowest dispatch processing time, the second lowest EMS response time and the lowest cost-per-vehicle operating hour among all the OMBI municipalities. In 2006, Niagara Region had decreased ambulance response times to an average of nine minutes and 39 seconds. This was an improvement of almost 20 seconds from 2005, and one minute and 30 seconds from 2004.

York Region has requested the Province transfer ambulance dispatch services to York Region EMS many times over the past several years with no success. A joint request for proposal has been issued in collaboration with the Regions of York, Peel, Halton, Durham and Simcoe County to procure a comprehensive review of the current EMS dispatch system and recommend a delivery model to optimize the dispatch system in the GTA. The results of the consultant review are expected in early 2009.

Local municipal fire services have amalgamated some fire dispatch services

Fire dispatch is the responsibility of the nine local municipalities. These services are divided into three dispatch centres located in Markham (covering Markham and Stouffville), Richmond Hill (covering Richmond Hill, Newmarket, Aurora, Georgina and East Gwillimbury) and Vaughan (covering Vaughan and King). These centres handle fire services dispatch for the eight local fire departments.

York Regional Police dispatch communications

York Regional Police expect to continue to operate dispatch functions from the existing facility located with Police Headquarters at the Administrative Building for the foreseeable future, and in recent years have made considerable strategic investments for that purpose. Any additional space required as a result of York Region's expanding population can be handled through the relocation of personnel from Headquarters to the new Aurora facility and minor space renovations of the existing centre.

It is expected that the eight municipal fire services will continue to use the radio infrastructure operated by York Regional Police. Both Richmond Hill and Vaughan have also recently entered into agreements with York Regional Police which permits them to dispatch from their own locations using the Computer Aided Dispatch infrastructure owned and operated by the police.

Relationship to Vision 2026

Consideration of a centralized 911 dispatch service falls under the Vision 2026 goals of "responding to the needs of our residents" and "supporting a safe and healthy community" by providing high quality emergency services.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Emergency dispatch services in York Region are funded by different funding bodies. York Region EMS dispatch services are funded 100% by the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, local municipal fire dispatch services are funded 100% by the local municipalities and York Regional Police dispatch services are funded 100% by York Region. Extracting the specific costs of dispatch from operating budgets would require additional effort and time.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

A joint 911 communications service for all York Region emergencies might improve operational, administrative, technological and fiscal efficiencies while improving outcomes for residents requiring the use of this service. Further investigation would be necessary to provide a definitive business case.

7. CONCLUSION

In the absence of the Province's willingness to transfer operational responsibility of EMS dispatch services to the Region, options to share EMS dispatch services remain unavailable. However, significant system efficiencies can be realized as demonstrated by Niagara Region's Ambulance Communication Centre. Findings from a comprehensive

feasibility study involving “905” EMS providers are expected in early 2009 which may provide the impetus to realize EMS dispatch system improvements.

Fire services appear to be content with the present dispatch arrangements and none have approached the police seeking further consolidation. The City of Vaughan has recently opened a new dispatch centre of its own. At such time as the eight municipal fire services agree to coordinate their operations from a common fire dispatch centre, then an opportunity may present itself for negotiations to take place with York Regional Police for the use of common facilities. Based on the results of the EMS feasibility study, York Region EMS may also be in a position to participate in those discussions.

For more information on this report, please contact Neil Garbe, Executive Director Strategic Initiatives and Administration at Ext. 1202.

The Senior Management Group and York Regional Police’s Executive Command Team have reviewed this report.