
Regional 911 Project Management: Interim Report

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District Local Technical Assistance program

Prepared for
City of Chelsea
City of Everett
City of Medford
City of Melrose
City of Somerville

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Prepared by
Metropolitan Area Planning Council
60 Temple Place, 6th Floor
Boston, Massachusetts 02111
Tel (617) 451-2770
www.mapc.org

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MAPC staff members involved in this project include Peter Dunn, Municipal Services Specialist; Stephen J. Daly, Director of Municipal Governance; and Rebecca Davis, Director of Government Affairs.

PROJECT STAKEHOLDERS COMMITTEE

City	Chief Executive
Chelsea	Jay Ash, City Manager
Everett	Carlo DeMaria, Mayor
Medford	Michael McGlynn, Mayor
Melrose	Robert Dolan, Mayor
Somerville	Joseph Curtatone, Mayor

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Executive Summary

The cities of Chelsea, Everett, Medford, Melrose, and Somerville have been exploring the consolidation of their emergency communications for several years. In 2013, a state grant funded the hiring of a technical consultant to begin producing an implementation plan. Once complete, this plan will present a comprehensive picture of the technology, facilities, operations, and governance of the regional center. It is expected that consolidation will greatly improve the effectiveness of emergency communication services in the participating communities, with a direct impact on public safety and emergency response. MAPC, through the Metro Mayors Coalition, has been supportive of this regionalization effort from the outset, and this DLTA funding supported MAPC's involvement in the project management of Phase I of implementation planning. This critical role helped ensure that the project moved forward according to schedule, and that municipal stakeholders remained fully engaged throughout.

Chapter One: Background

The 351 cities and towns of Massachusetts operate approximately 270 separate 911 call centers, a degree of fragmentation far greater than most other states. The state of Maryland, for example, has roughly one tenth the number of call centers as Massachusetts, despite having a comparable size and population. In New Hampshire, all emergency calls go to a single call center. The fragmentation of emergency communications can be both inefficient and ineffective. Staffing multiple separate centers is more likely to result in a mismatch between the staffing resources and the demand for services, and equipping these centers can require separate investments in redundant resources. At the same time, small local emergency communications operations can fall short of optimal performance levels when they lack the resources of larger centers to staff, train, and equip the operation to professional standards.

Understanding these advantages of consolidation, the State 911 Department began a grant program to incentivize Massachusetts municipalities to consolidate their 911 call answering and emergency dispatch functions into regional emergency communication centers, RECCs, serving two or more communities. The cities involved in this project began to discuss the regionalization of their emergency communications in 2009 through the Metro Mayors Coalition, an MAPC-led initiative of the mayors and managers of municipalities in the inner core of the Boston region. On behalf of 13 of these municipalities, MAPC applied for funding from the State 911 Department to study the feasibility of a consolidated 911 center. In November, 2010, RCC Consultants delivered the completed study, which concluded that a consolidation of all or parts of the region could deliver substantial cost savings and improvements in services. MAPC served as project manager for this feasibility study using funding from the Metro Mayors Coalition.

A smaller group of these municipalities elected to continue with a project to create an implementation plan. In 2012, MAPC applied for and was awarded funding on behalf of this group from the State 911 Department. After an unsuccessful initial procurement, MAPC conducted a second procurement and awarded a contract to iXP Corporation in January, 2013, for services to produce the first phase of an implementation plan.

Because of State 911 Department restrictions, MAPC was unable to use funds from this grant for project management activities. All of the grant funds were required to be expended on the vendor's services. A limited amount of funding from the Metro Mayors Coalition was set aside for MAPC's work on this project. Once that was expended, MAPC's executive director allocated DLTA funds to enable MAPC staff to continue to play its role as the project facilitator and primary point of contact for the vendor, the municipalities, and the state.

Chapter Two: Project Summary

To begin the project, MAPC sought to ensure that all participants were fully committed to pursuing the establishment of a RECC. Unlike in the earlier feasibility study, which sought to answer many of the participants' questions and compare alternatives, the implementation planning project presumes that all of the participants fully intend to establish the regional center as outlined in the project deliverable. To avoid expending effort and energy on cities that have no intention of joining, and to avoid the difficulty of revising the implementation plan if one of the participants were to withdraw, MAPC requested a formal letter of commitment from the cities' chief executives. The letter states the project's overall goals and ensures that the city's leadership is aware that their participation represents a certain level of commitment. Five cities stated their commitment.

MAPC held a project kickoff meeting with stakeholders committee, made up of the city manager and mayors of the cities, on March 15 in Somerville. The group agreed to the process and goals of the project and made assignments to project working groups. iXP, as technical consultant, defined the project methodology, answered questions about the overall benefits of consolidation, and planned next steps.

iXP's work on the project was divided into four main areas, each of which will continue in the next phase. iXP's technology work included a review and inventory of existing systems and the development of a technology plan and budget for the regional center. The facilities work defined the functional, space, and equipment requirements for a regional center. The staffing and budgeting work used call volumes and workload data to create preliminary staffing structures and levels, and also estimated long-term capital and operating budgets. Finally, iXP also began to outline the regional governance of the center.

Throughout the project, MAPC worked closely with iXP to ensure that the project was making progress and keeping to schedule. While iXP provided the project's technical expertise, MAPC has strong relationships with these cities that were invaluable in navigating the political issues in the project and ensuring that participants remained fully engaged. Over the course of the year, MAPC held three additional meetings of the stakeholders committee to deliver project updates and address issues. MAPC also held separate meetings for the cities' chiefs of police, fire chiefs, IT directors, and other department heads who will be responsible for implementing this plan. At the same time, MAPC maintained communications with the funders at the State 911 Department and led the successful application for a grant to fund Phase II, which began in October.

Chapter Three: Outcomes

This project is ongoing, and the full benefits will not be realized until the completion of the implementation plan and the subsequent establishment of the regional operation. Once operational, this would be by far the largest regional emergency communications center in Massachusetts. The project work to date has supported the expectation that the cities will improve their level of service dramatically by consolidating into a single, professionalized center. Moreover, this consolidation has further implications for additional opportunities for collaboration between public safety agencies. For example, it will facilitate police sharing criminal intelligence between cities, and will simplify mutual aid agreements for fire and rescue operations.

MAPC's involvement in the project has been especially critical to its success. Projects like this that involve multiple communities and a long time frame often risk losing the attention and support of municipal leaders. If one city steps up to take a stronger leadership role, other cities may fear that their voices have become secondary. MAPC has been able to use its position as a project manager rather than a project participant to negotiate a path for all of these leaders to keep the project moving forward. This involved drawing out specific leadership strengths from each of the participants and immediately addressing any concerns. MAPC has also drawn on its experience with police and fire departments to help coordinate the many public safety perspectives involved in this process.

As Phase I ended and preparations are beginning for Phase II, the project participants remain committed to the effort and pleased with the progress over 2013 after a long period in which the project was dormant. MAPC and the Metro Mayors Coalition look forward to continuing to support this implementation planning project in 2014.