

**Eastside Regional Public Safety Communications Center Initiative**  
**Common Themes from Initial Participant Interviews: April-May 2005**

As approved May 20, 2005  
*(incorporating consensus feedback from discussion on May 20)*

Number of Jurisdictions Interviewed: 13

1. Overall Vision, Goals, Issues:

Priority motivations for participants are a desire to gain efficiency and effectiveness in public safety dispatch. A third common theme, increased in emphasis from last year, is a desire to gain more control over dispatch operation and finance decisions, and ensuring the new agency is highly responsive to the needs and inputs from its members / customers.

All participants envision a new free-standing agency, governed by a joint board of representatives from participating jurisdictions.

Operationally, many participants want to see police and fire and emergency medical services dispatch operations separated (although most recognize benefits of cross-training staff).

The project is an important priority for all participants. In many jurisdictions, other projects will conflict for resources and attention.

2. Expectations for this Project Phase:

Most participants hope to gain:

- (1) A better understanding of which jurisdictions are committed to continuing the project;
- (2) Agreement on a governance model;
- (3) Rough estimate of the initial capital and ongoing operating costs of the new agency.

Participants do not expect the operational or technology details to be worked out in this phase.

Participants foresee a wide variety of potential barriers to success in this phase. Most commonly voiced was the challenge of getting agreement between the multiple parties at the table. Another significant issue is timing, given the life spans of major investments in technology that participants now have in place.

### 3. Governance and Finance:

As noted above, all participants are envisioning a new agency governed by a joint board, rather than a single jurisdiction contracting with multiple parties.

Most, but not all, participants anticipate wanting to be owners of the new agency, as opposed to contract subscribers. A few thought it would be strongly preferable for all participants to be owners in the organization.

Many raised the challenge of getting equity between participants at the governance table, given the large disparity in the size of participating jurisdictions.

Nearly all jurisdictions raised the importance of creating a structure that allows a meaningful voice for all participants, whether owners or subscribers.

Most noted the need to be able to separately address the unique needs of police agencies and fire and emergency medical services agencies.

Several jurisdictions mentioned the cities' Jail Advisory Group process as a governance example to avoid given the multitude (over 30) of parties at the table, and the politicization of decision-making through involvement of elected officials in what many regarded as operational, rather than policy, decisions.

Several jurisdictions raised concern about how to address latecomers, and the desire to ensure those taking risk by committing to the agency initially are rewarded in some way for that commitment. There should be an acknowledgement of risk taking and initial investment.

All participants identified either EPSCA or ValleyCom as positive governance models in that each is structured to separate operational detail decisions from higher-level governance decisions. When asked to explain the EPSCA and ValleyCom structures many participants were not clear about the specific configuration.

### 4. Governance and Finance Challenges:

Overcoming political disagreements, maintaining momentum in face of disagreement, and agreeing on the governance formula were identified as significant challenges by many.

The ability to ensure financial stability for the new agency in face of individual partner fiscal challenges was also noted by several parties as an issue.

5. Location:

There was a wide variety of feedback on the location issue.

Participants agreed that the location choice should be based on factors which include cost, location and control (actual or perceived). The preferred location should be determined through a complete analysis considering these factors, the ability to expand and other considerations which will be developed later.

Several participants are concerned that locating the dispatch center in any highly public facility would increase the risk of service interruption.

When asked about “deal killers,” several participants noted a location in Bellevue City Hall fell in to that category, but most were willing to allow the process to continue and evaluate the location based on empirical analysis. All expressed either a strong desire, or at least a willingness, to seriously explore other options. Some suggested that the decision to continue to participate in the process would be more straightforward if Bellevue was willing to be flexible concerning the location. Some participants wondered if Bellevue would be willing to objectively consider any location not controlled by Bellevue.

6. Timeframe for Implementation:

While some expressed a desire for the new agency to be up and running as quickly as possible, most thought it unlikely this could happen as soon as 2008. All agreed that a location other than Bellevue City Hall would preclude an operational start date of 2008 or earlier. Most anticipate a 5-year time frame to start-up.

7. Should the New Agency Provide Records Management Services? 800 MHz Network Operation?

Generally, fire and emergency medical services agencies were open to or supportive of the new agency providing records management services, while police agencies were skeptical or opposed. All participants, however, saw value to being able to view records from other agencies.

Nearly all agencies said it is logical for a single agency to provide both 800 MHz network and dispatch services, but it was noted that participants are currently served by two different 800 MHz network agencies: EPSCA and King County, potentially making this combination in a new agency more problematic. Participants expressed a variety of perspectives on the quality of service provided by these two agencies.

## 8. Operations at New Agency

Nearly all participants expressed an expectation that there would be some variation in the level of service provided by the new agency in response to demands of individual customers—and an understanding that a higher level of service would be more costly for recipients thereof.

## 9. Communications: Internal and External

Internal communications were not viewed as a high priority by participants who do not currently operate dispatch centers. Those with dispatch centers stressed the need to reinforce the long-term nature of this project and the fact that no decisions have been made regarding whether or how it will be implemented.

All participants agreed there was value, or at least no harm, in communicating with the King County Sheriff Office regarding the project (and potentially with client cities of the KCSO located in East King County).

## 10. Budget Issues

Most, but not all, city participants have a biennial budget in place. Fire Districts are all operating on single-year budgets. No agency had identified the need for funding to continue the project in 2006.

If the group determines that funds for the project are needed in 2006, most agencies will want that information by mid-August, some will want it earlier (June).

## 11. New and Noteworthy Ideas (not consensus items)

Items below are paraphrased from interviews.

*The regional 800 MHz is in its twilight: some believe the system will need to be entirely replaced in 2015. This raises the question whether a new regional dispatch agency designed and built out in the 2008-09 era will ultimately be compatible with the new 800 MHz technology following soon thereafter. Notably, it was reported (and has not yet been verified), while King County has set aside money to replace its 800 MHz system, Seattle, ValleyCom and EPSCA have not.*

*Perhaps the ValleyCom facility could be replicated on the Eastside—Reuse plans, specifications and know-how: It is very clear how much the ValleyCom facility cost to build, its operating cost, and how it might be improved.*

*Perhaps ValleyCom or the King County Sheriff dispatch facilities could serve as the back-up facility for the new Eastside dispatch center.*

*Perhaps Bellevue's new city hall could be a short-term location, and in the longer-term another facility serving the region could be built.*

*There can be real problems when partners can't fund their part of the budget: this impacts everyone. This must be anticipated and dealt with in the governance structure.*

*Perhaps there should be a date set at which one must commit to the project to enjoy a "founder's benefit," say, January 2007.*

*Some suggest that it is not good practice to collectively insist that everyone agrees with everything before proceeding: consensus is a goal, not a mandate in this process. If a party cannot agree with everyone else, they may need to simply fall away from the project. There is also a perspective that giving veto authority to partners has value, when the reasons for its application are agreed to as part of the governance structure*