



LEGISLATIVE ANALYST REPORT

TO: THE HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

FROM: PAULA VLAMINGS, Legislative Analyst

DATE: July 21, 2000

RE: **Non-Emergency Dispatch Services**

SUMMARY OF REQUEST

The Board of Supervisors has requested the Office of Legislative Analyst to research other jurisdictions to support consideration of a new non-emergency dispatch system to relieve San Francisco's 9-1-1 dispatch from non-emergency calls. Non-emergency calls for service would include calls for towing, illegally parked cars, noise complaints from private parties, or from businesses such as nightclubs.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

San Francisco's 9-1-1 system serves not only its residents, but also commuters to the City during the day, and many visitors. Although San Francisco has a high volume of calls, data on the volume of non-emergency 9-1-1 calls, the cost and the type of infrastructure of a 3-1-1 non-emergency system is not readily available. This is due in part to a transfer of the 9-1-1 call center from the Police Department at the Hall of Justice to the Emergency Communications Department (ECD) at 1011 Turk Street. Once the "cutover" has taken place in July, 2000 the Office of Emergency Communications will be conducting a review of Police and Fire communications. Thera Bradshaw, Director of the Emergency Communications Department, is involved in discussions at the national and state levels on the 3-1-1 issue. The Director indicates San Francisco is a good candidate for a 3-1-1 system to streamline city services. In her view, a statewide program that incorporates a resource for citizens to all city services, with legislative funding, makes the most sense. There is consensus among the California Emergency Services Advisory Board (CESAB) 3-1-1 Legislative Sub-Committee, that a statewide 3-1-1 program should be housed within the State Department of General Services Telecommunications Division, and patterned after the State 9-1-1 program, but staffed and managed separately from the 9-1-1 program.

Several pilot projects have been established to assess the opportunity for improving 9-1-1 services by using 3-1-1 for non-emergency access to law enforcement services. The projects that have been

completed are detailed below, and for the most part, show increased access to emergency services by reducing the number of non-emergency 9-1-1 calls. Jurisdictions that have instituted a 3-1-1 system include Baltimore, Chicago, Dallas, and San Jose. Los Angeles has a similar non-emergency number with 877 ASK-LAPD, and has engaged PriceWaterhouseCoopers to evaluate implementing a 3-1-1 system that incorporates automated services.

BACKGROUND

In response to a directive in 1998 by President Clinton to find a way to reduce the growing burden of non-emergency calls being placed on 9-1-1 systems, the U.S. Department of Justice, Community Oriented Policing Services, initiated a 3-1-1 trial in Baltimore, Maryland. The goal was to designate an easy to remember telephone number which could be used in all localities and reduce confusion among users, for example, travelers and people who move to new communities. The new number reduced the number of non-emergency calls to 9-1-1 by up to one third and improved 9-1-1 system access for life-threatening emergencies. As a result of the successful trial run, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) issued an order reserving 3-1-1 as the national code for non-emergency police calls and access to other government services. The FCC does not require local governments to institute and use 3-1-1, but assures that a standard number is available if they decide to do so.

The California Department of Justice issued a final report, *3-1-1 Non-Emergency Telecommunications System Strategic Plan*, in March of 1998. It describes the foundation and strategy for using 3-1-1 in California. The 9-1-1 program is administered by the state and legislation is currently being considered to implement a state administered 3-1-1 program. Assembly Bill 2837 establishes 3-1-1 for local agencies as a division of the statewide 9-1-1 offices. The bill does not require or direct any immediate action be taken if passed, nor does it allocate a funding mechanism.

ANALYSIS

The problem of 9-1-1 overload is primarily a “big city” problem, and establishing a 3-1-1 system as an alternative has appeared to alleviate some of the pressures on the 9-1-1 system. Therefore, the other jurisdictions surveyed for this report were large cities that had a 3-1-1 system in place, or were in the process implementing a 3-1-1 system. The cities surveyed experienced a sharp increase in the volume of 3-1-1 calls after an advertising campaign was conducted. Baltimore, Chicago and San Jose experienced a decrease in the number of non-emergency 9-1-1 calls. The Dallas system was not designed specifically to address alleviating the 9-1-1 system and Los Angeles has not yet fully implemented its 3-1-1 system.

Opponents of a 3-1-1 system include some national trade groups that represent 9-1-1 dispatchers, equipment manufacturers and managers. They are concerned a second number could cause confusion as to what constitutes an emergency. Additionally, they cite the additional equipment and staffing costs as another problem. Proponents argue that a three digit number is easier to remember and fewer non-emergency calls to the 9-1-1 system ensures more people in life-threatening situations will get assistance.

Baltimore

Baltimore was the first city in America, in October 1996, to provide 3-1-1 services for its citizens, focusing on providing non-emergency access to police services. Baltimore Mayor Kurt Schmoke told his

citizens in an aggressive advertising campaign to, "call 3-1-1 when there is urgency but no emergency." Baltimore also publicizes the 3-1-1 number for related citizen problems including animal disturbances, sanitation, minor flooding or power outages, open hydrants and water leaks. According to staff at the Communications Department of the Baltimore Police Department, the dispatch positions are filled with police officers on light/administrative duty or those involved with disciplinary issues. The Baltimore Police Department believe the 3-1-1 system is achieving the goal of community policing and reducing the volume of calls to patrol officers.

Initially, the 3-1-1 number was set up as a direct dial line to a person, however, early in 2000 a menu system was instituted. The menu prompts the caller choose between a 9-1-1 line, "street damage not involving injury", "storm damage not involving injury", one of the nine neighborhood service centers, or a non-emergency police line. To address the issue of multilingual access, Baltimore has Language Line capability, which is a translation service contracted through AT&T.

The system uses Nortell Call Center Management Information technology and was funded largely by AT&T and the US Department of Justice (DOJ). The grant the City received from the DOJ to start the program was approximately \$349,000. The City reported that 3-1-1 number reduced the load on the 9-1-1 system by over a third. The system is now funded through the operating budget of the Support Services and Communications Section of the Administration Bureau of the Baltimore Police Department.

Chicago

Chicago has combined police non-emergency service with calls received for city services into a single operation. Previously, these calls were answered by two separate 24-hour call centers, and encompassed myriad phone numbers and two area codes. It is now easier to report conditions such as damaged traffic lights, abandoned buildings, and graffiti by calling one easy to remember number, 3-1-1. The program was started in 1998 and in July of 1999, the city promoted the number through an advertising campaign. The call volume increased dramatically (staff at the Center had difficulty determining by how much due to several heat emergencies around the same time). Staff at the Center report anecdotally that after instituting the 3-1-1 number, only 5 percent of non-emergency calls are being received by the 9-1-1 system. The Center is currently funded for fifty-four civilian operators, and 200 light duty police officers are detailed to the Center to fill in as needed.

The Chicago 3-1-1 Call Center and was transferred from the Police Department to the Office of Emergency Services (OES), located in Mayor's office. The Center handles approximately three and a half million calls annually, and other non-emergency numbers are rolled over to the 3-1-1 number. The purpose of the 3-1-1 system is as a back-up for 9-1-1 calls, as well as a referral for all other city services. The calls are answered by a person unless the volume of calls is too heavy for the system to handle, and then the calls are routed to a voice mail menu. The calls are routed to three queues: first the call is routed to the screening queue where an operator determines the nature of the call. The calls are then routed to either a Police Report queue or City Report queue, depending on the issue. If the call is routed to the City Report queue, the call is answered or a service request is prepared and sent to the appropriate department.

The initial costs for the Center were funded out of the general fund, and the Center is now part of the Office of Emergency Services budget. It currently has a budget for personnel costs of approximately \$1 million, and did not receive any state or federal grants. The technical staff at the OES provided the technical support for the computer, and the Center worked with Ameritech as the outside consultant on the infrastructure and telephone system.

Dallas

Dallas was the first City to implement a "full service" 3-1-1 system explicitly designed to provide access to all non-emergency city services. The Dallas project grew out of a citywide reengineering effort to streamline City government. Formally cutting over to 3-1-1 in December of 1997, Dallas combined call-takers from several locations and dispatchers from six departments to be integrated into the 9-1-1 call center. Dallas purchased all new telephone workstations for its project and equipped all positions with both 9-1-1 and 3-1-1 call taking equipment and software.

Dallas' system is promoted as "your call to City Hall." It is not explicitly aimed at reducing 9-1-1 congestion but the addition of 3-1-1 call takers to the Center has provided more resources to answer calls more efficiently from emergency and non-emergency callers. Additionally, given an appropriate level of training, a call-taker can handle both types of calls during a shift. When resources demand it, every trained call-taker on a shift could be taking a 9-1-1 call, and the telephone system also alerts the operators when all the lines are busy so that those taking 3-1-1 calls can start taking 9-1-1 calls.

Because a "full service" system requires a detailed understanding of call taking for numerous city services Dallas has implemented a unique call handling protocol based on "scripts." Scripts are instructions to the 3-1-1 computer programs that display to call-takers only the appropriate questions for a specific citizen problem. With well over 100 operators working in the 3-1-1/9-1-1 Center scripting was a critical process. Dallas has over 600 such scripts now, which ensures that callers are handled consistently and efficiently by all the call-takers. Dallas' 3-1-1/9-1-1 call taking system is managed within the Dallas Fire Department by a General Manager who reports to an Assistant Chief. The 3-1-1/9-1-1 center also includes radio dispatchers outside of Police and Fire. Fire Dispatchers also report to the Assistant Fire Chief while the Police Dispatchers are a function within the Dallas Police Department.

Los Angeles-

The City of Los Angeles has a system in place called 877-ASK-LAPD (877-275-5273), which is a toll free non-emergency number for police matters only. This system has been in place since June of 1999. In 1997, the city developed a "3-1-1 Task Force" to study the feasibility of a universal non-emergency number for all city-wide services that would also help to reduce the burden placed on the 9-1-1 emergency system by non-emergency calls. The Police Department proposed an interim solution to the 9-1-1 problem that called for continued development of the 3-1-1 concept, but immediate implementation of the 877 ASK-LAPD number for police non-emergency matters only. In August of 1999, the city hired the consulting firm of PriceWaterhouseCoopers to conduct a study and develop a proposal for a 3-1-1/Internet Services System. PriceWaterhouseCoopers recently completed its report and proposal.

The 877 ASK-LAPD number was instituted with no official public advertising campaign. According to Lt. Dan Keefe of the LAPD, they conducted internal informational seminars and provided the information when 9-1-1 educational efforts were done. There is a plan to conduct an intensive media campaign in July of this year. The campaign will emphasize use of 9-1-1 for life-threatening emergencies and introduce 877 ASK-LAPD as the new police non-emergency number. According to Lt. Keefe, historically the total number of non-emergency calls, including 877 ASK-LAPD, has increased proportionately to the number of 9-1-1 calls, with emergency calls comprising 55% of the total calls and non-emergency calls comprising 45%. However, he stated that April of 2000 was the first time the increase in non-emergency calls (46.8%) outpaced the increase in 9-1-1 calls (53.2%). This trend continued through May and June, with emergency calls comprising 50.8% of total calls and non-

emergency calls comprising 49.2% as of June 30, 2000. They are also in the process of developing a call tracking system to determine how many 9-1-1 calls are non-emergency.

Currently, the city is studying the findings of the PriceWaterhouseCoopers report and discussing funding options. The proposal submitted by PriceWaterhouseCoopers is for a high-level, automated services and information system that would incorporate 3-1-1 and Internet access to city services. The proposal includes two phases to be implemented over 60 months at a total cost of approximately \$40 million.

San Jose

San Jose brought up its 3-1-1 system on November 11, 1997 with the aid of a grant from the California Department of General Services Division of Telecommunications. San Jose's system is oriented toward augmenting its existing police services via 9-1-1 and an existing seven digit non-emergency number. Prior to the 3-1-1 system, more than 40% of the calls made to the San Jose Police Department's 9-1-1 system were for non-emergency situations. After the installation of 3-1-1, non-emergency calls to the 9-1-1 system decreased by 10 percent. Additionally, the change from the existing seven digit non-emergency number to the 3-1-1 was done with a public awareness campaign, and calls to that line went up 40 percent. The San Jose 3-1-1 Web Page tells citizens that "if it's not an emergency and you need the police" to call 3-1-1. They list examples of 3-1-1 calls including abandoned vehicles, noise disturbances, parking complaints lost or found property, barking dogs, follow-up information on property crimes, telephone misuse and crimes not in progress.

The system provides for 3-1-1 calls to be routed by Pacific Bell to the Communication Center's existing non-emergency number and call received on those lines will be handled just as those coming in on an existing seven digit number. San Jose received \$200,000 from the State of California that was financed from the 9-1-1 surcharge fund. The State Department of General Services, Office of the 9-1-1 Program is funding a one year pilot project in San Jose to determine the effectiveness of 3-1-1 in reducing non-emergency calls made to 9-1-1. The State legislation provides for the funds to be used for public education and for Pacific Bell fees. The current annual operating budget for the system is \$96,000.

The San Jose pilot does allow Pacific Bell and most privately owned coin phones to access the system. Citizens calling 3-1-1 from pay phones will, however, have to pay for a local telephone call just as though they were dialing a seven digit number. San Jose's 3-1-1 calls are handled in their existing 9-1-1 center.

CONCLUSION

Based on information from the pilot projects in Baltimore, San Jose and Chicago, non-emergency calls to 9-1-1 are generally reduced by using a 3-1-1 non-emergency number. Public education was reported as essential in each city to the success of the 3-1-1 program. Two cities used the 3-1-1 program for all city services and the others used it only for non-emergency police matters.

In San Francisco, the Emergency Communications Department has been involved in discussions at the state level on the subject of a 3-1-1 system. The CESAB 3-1-1 legislative sub-committee will be receiving and reviewing reports from pilot projects, which should be helpful to the ECD. In order to determine if San Francisco is in need of a 3-1-1 non-emergency number, data would be needed on: 1) The cost of such a system, 2) The volume of non-emergency 9-1-1 calls, 3) The type of infrastructure needed, 4) Which services would be included and 5) What coordination would be needed with the various departments affected, including implementation of translation services such as LanguageLine. Once this information is available from ECD, data from the pilot projects and the State will aid in determining what non-emergency system would work best for San Francisco.

