

# SWOT analysis for PSAP Consolidation Subgroup

## [ DPS Comments in Blue ]

The goal of the Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) Consolidation Subgroup was to explore the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of PSAP Consolidation.

**On Tuesday July 21<sup>st</sup>**, the first PSAP Consolidation subgroup meeting was held and started with the basic question. **Can Wireless 911 phase I and II be implemented in rural, mainly unorganized Alaska, utilizing the existing blended State/Municipal dispatch model without PSAP consolidation.** The consensus of the group was that it could, and that having a consolidated dispatch center that serves as a PSAP for many areas/communities was not necessary.

**The next PSAP Consolidation subgroup meeting was held on July 28<sup>th</sup>**, in which the agenda items were to explore PSAP consolidation goals of the DPS, discussion of costs, and timelines.

The DPS was asked to get the discussion started and responded that they did not feel comfortable discussing the goals at the meeting.

DPS disagrees with the tone of this statement, DPS has offered to discuss the project in detail and previously provided the project goals and milestones in writing on 6/24.

The DPS said that their proposal consolidates the areas/duties of Matcom, the Soldotna and Ketchikan dispatch centers.

Clarification that the consolidation was only for DPS dispatch operations not for local community PSAPs. Current PSAPs will still have calls routed to them, but the dispatching workload for DPS calls for service will be transferred to a DPS dispatch center. It will follow the model currently used by Matcom to transfer calls to the City of Palmer, and the KPB dispatch to transfer calls to the cities of Kenai, Seward, Homer, and occasionally Anchorage.

Three members of the group with dispatch experience felt that the DPS staffing proposal was insufficient for the scope of their project. For example, comments were made that the DPS plan to have this service provided by 18 dispatchers....roughly four at any one time, per location, was less than the recommended level of 25 dispatchers for just the current Kenai facility alone, and that this staffing recommendation was made to them by Mr. Doolittle, who is the current DPS consultant.

Note that: a) the 911 Insight report was written in 2006 with the analysis based on the 1986 operating agreement between KPB and AST; subsequently, KPB and DPS negotiated another agreement (2013) which is the current operating agreement and presumably addressed the staffing needs identified seven years earlier; and b) the 2006

staffing analysis was based on the overall needs of the SPSCC which included support for Alaska State Parks, Central Emergency Services, Alaska Commercial Vehicle Enforcement, Cooper Landing Fire Department, Hope Sunrise Fire Department, KPB Office of Emergency Management, Marine Fisheries, Moose Pass Fire Department, Nikiski Fire & Ambulance, Ninilchik Fire & Ambulance, Soldotna Police Department, Alaska Department of Corrections, US Fire & Wildlife Service and US Forest Service. Therefore, the comparison between SPSCC staffing requirements and DPS staffing requirements is flawed.

DPS responded that they feel they can provide the service with 18 dispatchers per location and do not anticipate any future legislative personnel needs, but made comments that population growth and other elements such as overtime could create a need.

The DPS was asked about their 7/17 written comment to the working group that if allowed to proceed with the south-central dispatch facility they would need the four additional dispatch positions not funded by the legislature in early 2020.

Clarification: the four additional positions was necessary to fulfil the minimum complement of 18 ESD employees required to staff 3-to-4 positions 24/7, mirroring the staffing complement in Fairbanks.

They responded that their intent is to make the current palmer dispatchers state employees and use their projected savings from consolidating dispatch facilities to cover the cost.

Clarification: the existing Palmer dispatchers would be filling the overall 18 ESD requirement with the benefit of a lessor training requirement and quicker time to deploy.

The DPS was asked if the other positions they requested and the Captain position assigned to the role of manager... that was also not funded by the legislature, if those would be paid for with savings... or included as costs in their proposal. Meaning, that if they project saving \$700k from consolidating... but then need most, or all of the positions previously requested in the \$872 thousand dollar increment, would the actual savings may be little or none... they were asked to provide clarification.

**At the August 4<sup>th</sup> PSAP Consolidation meeting**, a recap of the findings of the group to date was given and members were given an opportunity to offer comments regarding the findings. No one expressed any concern with the following findings: That

1. PSAP consolidation is not necessary to provide enhanced 911, in rural Alaska
2. That the Goals of PSAP consolidation have not been defined.

DPS disagrees with this statement: See documentation for 6/24 detailing the goals regarding PSAP consolidation.

3. That dispatch consolidation will not immediately result in enhanced 911 in rural Alaska, that dispatch consolidation and expansion of enhanced 911 services is essentially two different tasks that will not be immediately related.

As with many technical projects, PSAP consolidation and enhanced 9-1-1 services are overlapping phases of the project.

We then moved on to explore unanswered questions from the prior meeting.

The first question is related to the benefits or goals of PSAP consolidation from the prior meeting...

According to the FY19 legislative appropriation of \$3.5 million for Enhanced 911, under the project description provided by public safety ... the second part of phase I consists of implementing enhanced 911 service for areas that are not serviced by an existing public safety answering point.

What we heard at the July 28<sup>th</sup>, meeting suggests that the current plan is to consolidate the existing PSAPs in the Valley, Kenai and Ketchikan, into a South-central facility and use that in conjunction with the Fairbanks facility to provide dispatch services to the consolidated regions.

Clarification: DPS wants to consolidate DPS dispatch operations into a Southcentral facility, not the current PSAP models and how they are set up for Ketchikan PD, Matcom, or KPB PSAPs.

The question was... how does the current DPS plan use those two consolidated centers to provide enhanced 911 service for rural areas without an existing PSAP, and does the current staffing levels of 18 dispatchers per center allow for an assumption that workload from rural Alaska?

The answer, from Captain Roberts and Mr. Rockwell was that the consolidated centers will provide a landing zone in the future for areas of the State without a PSAP to send calls to. No timeline was given for when this might happen, and that it would be dependant upon coordination with the Telco's and other factors. Mr. Rockwell later said that the DPS is not looking at changing any PSAPs currently taking calls.

The takeaway from this discussion was that dispatch consolidation and enhanced 911 for rural Alaska are two separate issues and that dispatch consolidation of itself will not enhance 911 in rural Alaska.

Contention: DPS' plan for two interoperable centers provides reliability for rural call-taking; the current configuration for DPS Fairbanks to receive 911 calls does not provide for sufficient reliability or needed redundancy.

The second question also related to goals or benefits of consolidation... was based upon budget projections and an org chart provided by Captain Roberts, to the working group, for the proposed dispatch consolidation. The Budget projections were dated May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020 and the Org Chart, 11/21/19.

The Org Chart reflects the positions requested from the legislature earlier this year, which had a fiscal cost of \$872 thousand and included 4 new dispatchers for the South-central facility, 2 tech support, one quality assurance position and a civilian manager.

The current budget projections sheet of 5/27/20 shows an annual cost savings from the proposed consolidated plan of \$893 thousand... which is very close to the previously mentioned increment of \$872 thousand for the 8 positions.

The subgroup heard at the July 28th meeting... per Mr. Rockwell, that the DPS is intending to use the savings from consolidation to fund the positions not funded by the legislature, specifically the 4 current Palmer dispatch positions that the DPS will convert to state employees.

The question that was asked to DPS as a follow up...is the DPS is assuming that the current legislative appropriation to DPS for dispatch needs will stay the same and that the savings, will simply be reallocated within the DPS in support of this project? Or another way to ask the question... will the DPS be recommending to the State and legislature that their current budget be reduced by the \$893,941 they are saying consolidation will save?

The answer was the DPS doesn't know, and is unsure what their final costs will be at this time. The takeaway from this for me was that unless the legislature reduces funding to the DPS, by the amount they claim they will save, then any savings will simply be reallocated by the department to fund the positions the legislature declined to fund, and the State will not save any money from dispatch consolidation.

Contention: DPS originally predicted almost \$700,000 savings that included budgetary allocations for the full complement of staff requests (Manager, QA, tech support and 4x ESD). When the legislature did not fund those position requests, the predicted savings increased in a linear fashion, to wit: no EMD program eliminated the QA position requirement; the Manager role was filled by part-time allocation of the HQ Captain; the new ESD positions would be funded by the contract cost savings.

In actuality, if this were the case and the DPS funding remained the same, then this proposal could actually cost more, as the Captain in charge of the consolidated dispatch centers, as show on the org chart is not counted as an expense for the communication centers (estimated at approximately \$200,000 annually in cost/benefits). It should be noted that DPS refused to provide the pay/benefit costs of this position. The DPS has stated on several occasions now that the Captain assigned to supervise these dispatch centers is a previously funded Headquarters Expense, and not a dispatch facility expense. My request to Ms. Demboski is that DOA should review this and determine if it's appropriate to not include this as a cost of this facilities operation.

Contention: if the allocation of the Captain's time is estimated at 10%, then this only represents a cost of \$20,000 annually (based on the estimated above).

Members again expressed a concern at this meeting that proposed DPS staffing levels were not sufficient based upon dispatch experience and how calls from a region such as Kenai could result in that region and the south-central dispatch centers coordinating on multi-jurisdictional calls. This is a future potential expense of the consolidation proposal if the proposed staffing levels prove to be insufficient.

Our next agenda item was a discussion regarding 911 call transport costs to remote Alaska. Christine O'Conner commented on how transport costs of 911 calls from remote Alaska will be extremely expensive and that many will need to be transmitted by Satellite.

Contention: DPS specifically requested the direct costs to those carriers expressing high capital cost requirements and has not received an appropriate reply. The estimates for back-haul costs are not in alignment with current industry practices and known switch configurations that would alleviate the requirements for dedicated facilities from each serving area.

Additionally, how many locations only have one cell tower and it will be difficult to get location information from callers in those locations. DPS acknowledged those concerns.

Contention: the requirement for multiple towers to provide location information is moot due to how location accuracy requirements are stated in CFR requirements.

The cost aspect of transferring rural 911 calls was not resolved by the working group. The Carriers claim the cost is untenable in many locations... the DPS counters with it's a federal requirement and seems to dispute the costs. I am not sure we can resolve the differences regarding costs, but my takeaway is that ultimately, the ability to provide enhanced 911 in rural Alaska will progress at the speed of the carriers, regardless of what DPS does.

The alternative seems to be that if the state forced the issue, smaller carriers would simply be unable to absorb the costs of compliance and would either go out of business or the State would wind up subsidizing due to the inability to pass on the costs to consumers in unorganized Alaska. For the record I want to state that this is a potential unanticipated future liability for the state.

Contention: This is not a state obligation, this is a federal obligation. The State is merely providing the technically-capable PSAP with which to receive the calls.

Another member commented on the added complexity and diminishment of service to the MatSu valley from the DPS dispatch consolidation proposal and indicated that he would

provide those concerns in writing to the group. A similar concern was made regarding the Kenai region.

### **At the August 11<sup>th</sup>, PSAP Consolidation Subgroup Meeting the following topics were discussed...**

**How DPS might collaborate and save resources** by sharing in the phase II upgrades that some rural communities have already done, e.g. Bethel, Kotzebue and Skagway. Can those PSAPs coverage be expanded in coordination with DPS to enhance public safety?

The DPS responded that they were not opposed to looking into coordination and it could save resources, however it has not really been explored in any great detail. DPS stated that they are looking for a better way to handle emergency calls to include those that are received in other ways such as 1-800#s. DPS wants to serve the people (dispatching) that they respond to and consistently deliver a product. DPS relayed a concern that areas that serve as PSAPs could disband and DPS would have to pick up the work, which they said has happened in the past.

Comment: DPS believes that this migration to DPS responsibility is due to local jurisdictions not having sufficient revenue to support competent and reliable 24/7 call taking and recognition of the risks of providing a sub-standard public safety service. Additionally, DPS would likely be required to augment costs associated with each additionally PSAP answering DPS calls.

### **Discussion regarding standards or best practices involving call transfers from PSAPs.**

General discussion was that by DPS adding the south-central dispatch center to serve many regions... **call transfer problems will be created**, where calls will come into a PSAP like Matcom or Soldotna and then be transferred to the DPS South-central dispatch center...that the delay could be minutes while a dispatcher in one location attempts to call another.

Contention: DPS notes that the issues with MatCom transferring calls to Anchorage Police Department are due to the provisioning that was established between the two agencies and should not be considered a 'best practices' approach nor applied as an issue to any DPS planning.

Another concern is that in a multi agency dispatch response MatCom or Soldotna could be providing a caller emergency medical dispatch, while another dispatcher at the DPS facility would also be occupied by the same call dispatching a response.

Contention: This is not unusual and should not be regarded as a 'special case.' DPS notes that having additional call takers and dispatchers (i.e., multiple dispatch centers) provides some relief to the multi-agency response scenario described by Ms. Goggia in a prior

meeting. Instead of assuming overall responsibility for numerous agencies, each agency dispatch center would directly support its constituents, thereby relieving the Primary PSAP of that workload.

Examples were given of how current call transfers at Matcom are around 4% and would be expected to increase to 52% or more, increasing overall workload, wait times for callers and dropped calls. Viewed as a negative result of dispatch consolidation.

Contention: this estimate is an opinion since actual call statistics for DPS-related workloads are not available. This position also ignores ways to mitigate dispatch center call volumes, such as better public awareness of no-emergency telephone numbers, online access to DPS, and reinforcement of the proper use of 911 calling.

## **Member Discussion**

As we look at identifying the feasibility of the DPS proposal to consolidate the dispatch responsibilities, for the DPS, from the Ketchikan, Soldotna, and Matcom facilities into a new south-central facility in Palmer.... That will serve Troopers across many SE Alaska communities; across many Peninsula communities such as Soldotna, Seward, Homer... and south-central communities such as Palmer, Talkeetna, Glenallen and others... it's important we determine if the proposed staffing levels are adequate to handle existing calls in those regions.

DPS believes that the staffing is adequate based on the projected service populations, historical call for service and incident report volumes, as well as the anticipated efficiencies of a DPS CAD-to-ARMS integration.

As the group explored this issue, it became clear that the proposed DPS consolidated dispatch facility in Palmer...also referred to as the south-central dispatch facility... will not, by its self result in any improvement of 911 services in rural Alaska... and as Capt Rick Roberts said in a previous meeting, will simply be a landing zone for calls from rural Alaska at some point in the future and we were unable to determine a timeline as to when that could happen.

Contention: DPS would be establishing redundancy in the call taking environment, thereby increasing reliability. Also, in conjunction with establishing a SOC, DPS intended to provide new points-of-entry for wireless carriers with the intent of reducing the overall number of 'demarcations' required of carriers. Currently, each PSAP has a carrier demarc for receipt of 911 calls. In a future-state Next Generation environment, as few as two demarcations would be required statewide.

The concerns based upon the experience and discussion of members of this group was that the current DPS proposed staffing levels are insufficient for a variety of reasons.

Per the DPS response to Ms. Hall's questions dated August 4<sup>th</sup>, the DPS is projecting a need for 18.6 positions for the south-central facility, but intend to staff the facility with 18 positions, four of which will be Palmer city employees that the DPS will convert to State employees. This still leaves a deficit, per the DPS of one part time, or full time employee depending on how one looks at it.

Contention: DPS provided a staffing calculation according to national standards which is being found 'unacceptable.' In any case, the deficit of less than one full-time position is trivial, as most centers accommodate this vacancy on a daily basis.

Beyond that, the members of this group with experience managing dispatch facilities, (e.g. detailed analysis provided by Suzanne Hall) discussed that depending upon the turnover rate projected **that actual dispatcher needs for the South-central facility could be as high as 31.**

Contention: this statement does not reflect that very few jurisdictions allow for 'over-hire' (presumed to be the calculation of 31 positions) which is a reasonable response to a typical rate of vacancies.

A higher staffing level is supported by the discussions of the group which have included:

1. the increased multi jurisdictional coordination demands of a consolidated facility,
2. the delays created by effectively creating a secondary PSAP for the south-central region which would increase the 9-1-1 transfer rate from the current 4% to approximately 52-55% as mentioned by Mr. Butcher
3. The goal of the DPS to relive data entry responsibilities of the Troopers by adding that task to the dispatch center.

Contention: This is an existing responsibility of DPS dispatch centers and is not additive.

This lead to a concern with many in the group that the DPS proposal of 18 actual dispatchers is unrealistic.

Contention: the statement of "unrealistic" when in fact this analysis was done and in accordance with a thoughtful methodology based on national recommendations.

If we simply took the midrange approach between the 18 low end and 31 high... we would be around 26, resulting in a future legislative need of at least 8 positions.

Contention: basing the discussion on a "midrange approach" is simply guessing.

As discussed at a prior meeting... 25 dispatchers was recommend for just the Soldotna facility alone... and 75% the calls handled by that facility are DPS calls. And finally... once again... this is just to maintain existing dispatch services to the consolidated regions and not provide increased services to rural Alaska.

Contention: What is the conclusion (“...finally...once again...”)?

The group was challenged to use the data presented and their experience to determine a realistic staffing recommendation for the south-central facility that could be included as findings to the main working group.

Contention: if the conclusions have no substance, then they should be stated as such.

There was significant discussion and concern with the proposed DPS staffing levels for a number of reasons and the group struggled with a general consensus... minus DPS... that several additional dispatch positions would be needed for the proposed DPS south-central consolidated dispatch facility to assume the call volume and tasks of the consolidated regions.

Contention: The Working Group should be clear on the language of the statements, to wit “consolidated regions” only applies to DPS operations and not the any other jurisdiction or dispatch center service area.

Suzanne Hall provided the group with a detailed analysis based upon her years of experience with dispatch that suggested DPS staffing needs could go as high as 31 employees to operate 5 dispatch stations at the south-central facility.

Discussion that the south-central dispatchers would need to monitor three DPS radio frequencies and two Palmer frequencies while answering phone calls and that level of situational awareness was impossible with the DPS proposal.

Contention: what is the source and rationale of the ‘impossible’ conclusion?

Further, that in just the immediate MatSu Talkeetna, Glennallen regions its common to have 10 active calls with 10-15 pending at any one time, in addition to radio traffic from HQ personnel, Judicial services and up to 50 units in the region.

Contention: what is the conclusion based on this statement of fact? Most law enforcement agencies have calls pending during times of high demand.

Discussion also about the amount of time it takes to train a dispatcher fully as 4-6 months and how the trainee and trainer essentially count as one position during that time.

As the group discussed a realistic staffing level, a review was made of how many dispatchers it takes now to provide services to the areas DPS proposes to consolidate. Currently:

Matcom has 5 dispatchers on at any one time, of which roughly 52% of calls are for DPS. Meaning that about half are needed for DPS calls, or 2.5 positions.

Soldotna has 4 dispatchers on at any one time, of which approximately 75% of calls are for DPS, so three are needed for DPS support.

Ketchikan has up to 2 dispatchers on at any one time of which 100% of calls (with some minor exceptions) are DPS.... So two positions for Ketchikan and southeast Alaska DPS coverage.

Contention: DPS Ketchikan does NOT in fact have two ESDs on duty and DPS analysis reflects that the call volumes do not represent a full-time demand for dispatching availability.

In essence, of the 11 dispatchers that are currently working in these three facilities now, roughly 7.5 employees would be needed at any one time to cover just the DPS calls in these regions. Realizing that the DPS plan is to shift dispatching from the current State/Municipal blended dispatch model to a State only consolidated facility with the intent to “add” responsibilities (additional PSAP coverage/data entry duties) it would seem reasonable that roughly the same number of dispatchers, at a minimum, currently serving DPS would be required in a new consolidated facility.

Contention: DPS is not increasing the work load, this is the current demand, of which is interspersed with local and other agency requirements (e.g., fire, rescue, parks, etc.)

Additionally, as was pointed out... the current blended dispatch model gives the DPS a call “surge capacity benefit”. In essence, that by partnering with local governments in the current blended approach those times when major emergencies such as natural disasters, major criminal incidents, etc. the DPS benefits from a larger dispatch resource base (currently 11 dispatchers) that they would not have access to in a “go it alone” DPS consolidated dispatch model (3-4 at any one time).

Contention: this statement is confusing and contradictory. The benefit is solely to DPS in providing operational resilience. DPS notes that many (if not most) dispatch centers in Alaska do not have effective continuity of operations capabilities; DPS would have implemented one the only ‘hot-stand by’ dispatch center configurations in the State.

Examination of the analysis provided by Ms. Hall, **for the DPS to staff just five stations, with industry standard turnover rates, would require over 30 employees; far more than the 18 planned by DPS.** Assuming that the current roughly 7.5 dispatchers that handle DPS calls in these regions now, could be handled by 5 dispatchers in the future in the consolidated DPS facility, **DPS would still need an additional 12 positions.**

Contention: this statement is not clear in suggesting that DPS should ‘over-hire’ to accommodate position vacancies which is not common practice.

DPS said they understand the concern of the group that more dispatchers may be needed, but feels confident they can do the job with 18 dispatchers in the South-central facility

and there may be times when Fairbanks would need to pull some of the workload and vice versa during peak times. **DPS also said that although they feel confident in their plan, they could not say 100% that it would work.**

#### Strengths of PSAP Consolidation

- DPS has full operational control over the consolidated PSAPs and can add additional duties and responsibilities.
- Per DPS a consolidated PSAP could be a landing zone for additional PSAP consolidation in the future.

#### Weaknesses / Threats of PSAP Consolidation

- Call transfer issues, e.g. delays, dropped calls, additional workload to PSAPs
- DPS plan will not save any money and will almost certainly result in the need for additional dispatchers and increase state costs to provide the same level of service.

Contention: this is an incorrect conclusion: DPS has indicated *cost savings*.

- Loss of local dispatch knowledge for local calls.

Contention: this is an existing issue with local agency dispatch centers and not a new issue.

- Loss of dispatch surge capacity from a blended State/Municipal approach that achieves efficiency of scale.

Contention: this is an existing issue with local agency dispatch centers and not a new issue.

- Loss of connectivity within the consolidated areas caused by natural disasters, technology issues, etc. could result in diminishment of dispatch ability (eggs in one basket approach).

Contention: DPS has communicated a plan with substantial consideration of infrastructure and operational reliability.

- The DPS consolidated dispatch center will not immediately have emergency medical dispatch capabilities that are currently enjoyed in the blended dispatch model.

Contention: as previously communicated, DPS had every intention of implementing an EMD program for both NOC and SOC.

## Opportunities of PSAP Consolidation

- Hard to quantify as the DPS presented no goals, timelines, areas/populations served.

## ADDED OPPORTUNITIES

- DPS would establish Phase I/II capabilities providing call-back number and location information for rural wireless 911 calls improving service to constituents by being able to find them on a map.
- DPS would establish a 'default PSAP' available to any jurisdiction for back-up 911 call taking.
- DPS would have established the beginnings of a statewide ESInet that would have supported call transfers between centers using existing state resources and minimal incremental cost.
- DPS would be able to standardize operations and provide a consistent level and scope of service to DPS officers.