

EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES (EMS) FIRE TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

June 24, 2013

The EMS Fire Transport Committee met in the Public Safety Services Center, Conference Room 130, 12490 Ulmerton Road, Largo, Florida, at 1:02 P.M. on this date with the following members present:

Senator (Retired) Jim Sebesta, Chairman
Commissioner Karen Williams Seel, Pinellas County Commission
Mayor Bill Foster, City of St. Petersburg
Chief Doug Lewis, Pinellas Park Fire Department
Captain Jim Millican, Lealman Special Fire Control District
Kelly Cullen, BayCare Health System

Not Present

Jay Ravins, City of Clearwater

Also Present

Bruce Moeller, Executive Director, Public Safety Services
Craig A. Hare, Public Safety Services
Greg Woodrum, Public Safety Services
Don S. Crowell, Senior Assistant County Attorney
Dr. Jay Fitch, Fitch & Associates
Guillermo Fuentes, Fitch & Associates
Other Interested Individuals
Arlene L. Smitke, Deputy Clerk, Board Reporter

Agenda

1. Welcome
2. Approval of Minutes from 7-9-12
3. Presentation by Fitch & Associates, LLC
4. Adjournment

WELCOME

Chairman Sebesta called the meeting to order at 1:02 P.M., and at his request, Committee members and staff in attendance introduced themselves. A sign-in sheet has been filed and made a part of the record.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Seel moved, seconded by Ms. Cullen and carried, that the minutes of the July 9, 2012 meeting be approved as submitted.

Chairman Sebesta announced that a public hearing will be held following today's presentation and discussion by the Committee; whereupon, he instructed anyone wishing to speak to complete a Citizen Comment Form, indicating that the meeting would end no later than 5:00 P.M. and speaking time may be limited accordingly.

PRESENTATION BY FITCH & ASSOCIATES, LLC

Mr. Moeller related that Fitch & Associates delivered its draft report in late June; that the report has been widely disseminated; and that today's presentation to the Committee is one of the deliverables specified under its contract; whereupon, he indicated that the final report is due in early July; and that Fitch & Associates will present its report to the Board of County Commissioners, sitting as the EMS Authority, at its July 19 and August 1 work sessions.

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation titled *Modeling Approach – Pinellas County*, a copy of which has been filed and made a part of the record, Dr. Jay Fitch provided background information regarding his firm and the Optima Corporation, which developed the modeling software utilized for the study; whereupon, he reviewed the project scope, methodology, and a list of participating stakeholders, pointing out that the system currently in place is an excellent one that objectively benchmarks, in a superior fashion, both clinical outcomes and customer service.

Dr. Fitch introduced Guillermo Fuentes, who indicated that today's presentation contains a new section discussing hybrid models, which was added in response to queries related to Page 10 of the draft report; and that he wishes to give the fire chiefs an opportunity to preview and discuss the information, as they have done with the other modeling scenarios. Mr. Fuentes noted that the report was always intended to be an evaluation of pre-existing reports, providing an operational perspective and supplying numbers and facts to form the basis of a meaningful discussion between the County and the stakeholders; and that the intent was never to present a series of recommendations; whereupon, he reiterated comments by Dr. Fitch, indicating that one of the most interesting parts of the consultancy is that it is based on an excellent system, which is generally not the case; that the focus is on maintaining that excellence in the field from a patient's perspective; and that the report makes more sense if that premise is kept in mind.

Continuing the PowerPoint presentation, Mr. Fuentes discussed the modeling, providing a description of the various scenarios and a summary of the findings, as follows:

- Baseline
 - Achieves response time targets; less than one percent difference from historic fire model and three to four percent from the historic Sunstar model
 - Combined 1.2 million unit hours
 - Crew costs of \$112.9 million
- Integrated Performance Solutions Proposal (IPS A-3 - Resource Enhancement and Optimized)
 - Achieves response time targets as an aggregate, but some areas are hurt
 - Lower in performance than today, but still achieves 90th percentile benchmark
 - To be financially sustainable and operationally manageable, would cut over 215,000 unit hours from system
 - Decommissions 25 apparatus, and 150+ firefighters would need to be laid off
 - Crew costs of \$90.8 million
 - Incurs additional fleet operational costs of \$5.0 million; use of heavy equipment for response increases risk of accidents and vehicle breakdown
 - Demonstrates extra capacity in the system
 - Not implementable
- Sanford/Millican-1 (SM-1 - Initial Configuration)
 - Achieves response time targets
 - Crew costs of \$111.8 million
 - Crew utilization levels are not safe to implement
 - To be cost competitive, cuts over 135,000 unit hours from the system; basically delivers less service for the same cost
 - New governance structure operationally difficult to implement
- Sanford/Millican-2 (SM-2 - Utilization Constrained)
 - Achieves response time targets
 - Crew costs of \$120.9 million, significantly more than other models
 - Complies with utilization recommendations
 - New governance structure operationally difficult to implement

During the presentation, Mr. Fuentes indicated that costs were looked at from a global standpoint; and that the report does not distinguish between which agency would bear the costs,

as all costs will ultimately be borne by the taxpayer. He noted that cost comparisons are based strictly on personnel costs, and it is assumed that all existing administrative efficiencies would carry over to a new system.

Hybrid Models

Mr. Fuentes reviewed a chart showing utilization rates by unit type across the various models, indicating that it would help the Committee in understanding the analysis of hybrid models; whereupon, he reiterated that hybrid models were not addressed in the draft report, other than a brief reference on Page 10. He explained that hybrid models are based on the principle of subdividing calls to multiple transport providers by geography or call type; and that an apples-to-apples analysis requires calculation of crew time on task; whereupon, he reviewed charts showing cost per time on task, cost per call, and cost of fragmented systems, and presented the following conclusions:

- Pinellas already has very high functioning private transport provider that sits at the higher end of the work load, maximizing every dollar put on the field, and a seamless fire system that responds to every call irrespective of boundaries. All the fat has already been sucked out of the system.
- A financially viable model for simulation could not be identified.
- The additional cost in the hybrid system is congruent with the findings of Sanford/Millican-1. In order for a fully optimized fire transport model to be cost competitive, the system would need to be reduced by 135,000 unit hours.
- Assuming no additional dollars were spent on the fire system and fire departments were allowed to transport based on their capacity, the County would still need to give the private provider an additional \$4.675 million to maintain the current level of service.
- Fragmentation of the transport model introduces too much idle time and non-contiguous territory that adds cost to the system.

Community-wide Alignment of Resources for Efficiency and Service (CARES) Model

Noting that a number of things had been learned from the various simulations performed, Mr. Fuentes presented the CARES model, indicating that redundancy in the system between the hours of 10:00 P.M. and 8:00 A.M. could be eliminated while maintaining identical response times as exist today, saving money; that doing so would only marginally increase workload on fire engines; and that there are some advantages to using Medical Priority Dispatch (MPDS), where appropriate.

Mr. Fuentes reviewed the methodology and results of the CARES simulation, noting that simulations were conducted for two scenarios: Sunstar dispatched only as needed for low acuity calls; and fire vehicles dispatched only if no Sunstar vehicle is available within a ten minute driving time. He summarized the findings and recommendation as follows:

- Achieves response time targets
- Crew costs are less than current system - \$105.7 million
- Retains a balanced inventory of apparatus – matched to call demand
- Utilizes current governance structure
- Recommends use of fire equipment on low acuity (alpha) calls as primary response
 - Removing fire from alpha calls does not reduce unit hours
 - Sending fire as primary responder increases fire workload
 - Follows fire's community mission
 - Reduces unnecessary pressure on transport units by potentially cancelling 8,000 transports, scheduling 8,000 transports, and only having 8,000 immediate responses on low acuity calls
 - Sets the system up well for accountable care in which patient transport may not be the key focus of the system
 - Allows fire department paramedics to maintain, increase, and develop patient contact skill sets

In closing, Mr. Fuentes indicated that the CARES model maintains the excellent clinical performance that the community has learned to appreciate; that it fundamentally maintains response times, with only a marginal difference during certain hours of the night; that it reduces cost, although not significantly; and that it is realistic and implementable.

QUESTIONS BY THE COMMITTEE

Responding to queries by Chairman Sebesta, Mr. Fuentes indicated that the consultant did not conduct an age analysis as part of its study; that Pinellas County has a significantly older population than typical communities it works with; that maintaining the clinical excellence of the system is important to the community, whose demands for clinical intervention is higher than other areas; and that the evaluation is based on that fact.

Mr. Fuentes responded to queries by Chief Lewis and Captain Millican pertaining to various workload and cost calculations, and indicated that all scenarios are based on full cost systems

without consideration of revenue or allocation of costs among the participating agencies, noting that the intent is to give the County and cities the ability to have a discussion based on real costs; and that the division of those costs would be a matter of negotiation.

In response to query by Mayor Foster, Mr. Fuentes related that, while the CARES model was designed to include the entire county, any model that matches supply and demand offers the opportunity to save money; and that it would not be necessary for all cities to participate.

Chairman Sebesta inquired whether the study compared the existing Pinellas County model to other systems in comparable sized cities, and Dr. Fitch related that the County's system is unique in the way it was designed and evolved, and that he is unaware of any comparable system. Mr. Fuentes added that the level of care delivered by both the first responders and ambulance service is clinically above that delivered almost anywhere in North America; that despite apparent conflicts between the County and cities, it runs in a seamless manner with one clinical director; and that he could not find enough benchmarks to compare it to another system.

Captain Millican questioned whether the recommendation would be to maintain the status quo, as any change would reduce the level of care provided; and Mr. Fuentes indicated that there is an opportunity to reduce redundancy during night hours, which is an approach that is starting to show up in fire based models; whereupon, Dr. Fitch reiterated that the purpose of the study was not to make recommendations, but to present information to allow a logical dialogue to occur.

Indicating that it is nice to have expert affirmation of the quality of the current system, Mayor Foster stated that even the CARES model does not dramatically reduce costs; and that the matter then becomes a political discussion regarding sustainability and the risk of implementing a less costly system; whereupon, Mr. Fuentes clarified that the recommendation will position the system for the future by stating that the fire department has a capacity to play a larger role in community-based paramedicine; that it is a very good system that can be trimmed without any dramatic effect; that while the savings would amount to only \$6 to \$7 million, it would be somewhat significant and would stabilize costs over time; that a system producing a \$20 to \$30 million savings would dramatically change the service level; and that while no one can predict the future of health care, he believes the CARES model will build a foundation for changes that may occur in the next five years.

CITIZEN COMMENTS

Assistant Chief Joseph Connors, Clearwater Fire Rescue, indicated that his organization submitted questions prior to the deadline specified by Fitch & Associates but has not received a response, inquiring when can it expect a response so that it can formulate its next step. Mr. Fuentes stated that the consultant's agreement with the County specifies that all responses to the draft report will be tabulated and addressed in the final report; and that there is no provision for direct feedback to the responders; whereupon, Mr. Moeller indicated that the consultants are receiving comments today and will deal with them as they deem appropriate; and that the Board of County Commissioners/EMS Authority will review the final report and take additional public comment on July 19 and August 1, 2013.

Chief Tom Jamison, East Lake Fire Department, inquired whether the consultant can provide a per capita comparison of the current system versus other systems in the country; and Mr. Fuentes stated that he is not a huge believer in per capita cost, but will address the matter in the report, with a caveat. Referring to his home city of Niagara Falls, Canada, Mr. Fuentes related that the city has 100,000 residents and 13 million visitors per year; that, similar to Pinellas County, visitors do not contribute to the tax base, resulting in a very high per capita cost for ambulance service; and that certain other cities have large populations, low EMS volume, and low per capita cost. Responding to further query by Chief Jamison, Mr. Fuentes related that following a dispute regarding cost allocation, hotels are now required to pay a fire-based tax to support the Niagara Falls Fire Department.

Commissioner Seel requested a cost-per-call versus cost-per-capita comparison for high performance systems in the United States, and Mr. Fuentes agreed to provide the information in the report, indicating that an asterisk would be included to address the migratory population.

Responding to queries by Captain Millican regarding various data and calculations, Mr. Fuentes expressed his desire to ensure that the information is correct; and indicated that Chris Callsen of Optima Systems will address specific questions from the fire chiefs during a conference call scheduled for tomorrow morning.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon motion by Mayor Foster, seconded by Commissioner Seel and carried, the meeting was adjourned at 2:27 P.M.