

8 Conclusion

The current infrastructure of stations and apparatus, based on Management Partners' assessment of station location, number of apparatus and call volume,, if properly maintained should be adequate to handle most projected growth in population and service demand between 2010 and 2035. There are areas in Gilroy and San José where planned new development will require that new stations be constructed to provide service at current levels.

The unprecedented revenue loss experienced by public agencies in California, coupled with expenditure increases to maintain current pension benefits, have required cities to make significant expenditure reductions, including reductions in fire department budgets. To this point, most fire and emergency service providers have accommodated budget reductions without having a significant impact on emergency response performance. Changes in overtime practices and off-hours battalion chief coverage and reductions in training, prevention and emergency preparedness have been the primary focus of cuts in municipal departments. Although less sharply impacted because of a more stable revenue base, fire districts are beginning to experience less robust revenue.

The projected continuation of fewer financial resources for local government will require fire and emergency service providers to continue to look for ways to make further budget reductions. Given the structure of the current fire service delivery system and the limited flexibility in fire department budgets, this could lead to budget reductions that would degrade emergency response performance. As an alternative, there are several opportunities available to the cities and fire districts in Santa Clara County to achieve economies and efficiencies without service degradation. Most of these opportunities require departments to integrate various common functions through the development of partnerships, JPAs, or other cooperative strategies.

The economy and efficiency opportunities that have the broadest application include consolidating communications, conducting joint training and maintaining apparatus jointly. Consolidation of communication functions offers the opportunity to significantly improve the service delivery system. It would also create other economy and efficiency opportunities such as boundary drops.

Communication consolidation would require the inclusion of police communications to achieve decreased costs.

Finding a solution to the fragmented delivery system in the south of the County appears to be progressing based on a working group including the cities of Gilroy and Morgan Hill and the Central and South Fire Districts. Strengthening the capacity of volunteer fire departments to improve service in underserved areas and providing some compensation to those public agencies that provide responses into those areas will take the development of new revenue from the affected underserved properties.

Public accountability, as measured by the ease of access of the public to information on governance, governing board meetings and financial information is strong in the municipal departments. Fire districts can take steps through improvements in their websites to improve access and transparency of operations.