

**THE IMPACT OF CONSOLIDATING POLICE SERVICE DELIVERY BY  
MULTIPLE SMALL URBAN LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES BY THE  
YEAR 2005**

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**This Command College Independent Study Project is a FUTURES study of a particular emerging issue in law enforcement. Its purpose is NOT to predict the future but rather to project a number of possible scenarios for strategic planning consideration.**

**Defining the future differs from analyzing the past because the future has not yet happened. In this project, useful alternatives have been formulated systematically so that the planner can respond to a range of possible future environments.**

**Managing the future means influencing the future--creating it, constraining it, adapting to it. A futures study points the way.**

**The views and conclusions expressed in the Command College project are those of the author and are not necessarily those of the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST).**

## INTRODUCTION

Providing police service to small urban cities has increasingly become more difficult over the past decade. Individual cities continue to maintain their "own" police department as a means to provide that service, even at the sacrifice of other services. A police department is typically the single most expensive item in a city's budget, yet it provides little or no revenue to the city treasury. The City of Bell, for example, spends 75% of its total city budget on the police department.

Several cities have consolidated other services such as fleet and street maintenance, tree trimming, etc. The same approach has been discussed for the police service, but actual implementation has been minimal. Select services such as communications or custody have been consolidated on a regional or county wide basis. The City of Corte Madera and Larkspur joined forces and established the Twin Cities Police Authority. Twin Cities is being looked at as a national leader according to Neal Peirce's article in Nation's City Weekly.<sup>1</sup> The state of Nevada implemented this strategy in forming the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department. Florida also followed this trend in establishing the Metro-Dade police agency. Applying the trend to multiple small urban agencies has not yet been accomplished in California

California has only consolidated two police agencies into one. Chief Rick Ter Borch of the Arroyo Grande Police Department did a

comprehensive study on consolidation through a Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) Management Study. In March of 1994, Chief Ter Borch prepared the Feasibility Study For Consolidation of Police Services to consolidate his department with the nearby Grover Beach Police Department. He concluded that political resistance is the single most obstacle to consolidation, and the reason this proposal did not move forward.

In scanning the available literature, the issue of consolidation has widespread application to government services in general. Bill Barnes, writing in *National Cities Weekly* called it Metropolitan Government.<sup>2</sup> What Ana Marie Walsh, writing for *American City and County*, called the "Urban Challenge to Government"<sup>3</sup> is causing local governments to re-assess the way they "do business". Doing more with less is the motto for the 21st Century. Janet Ward, writing for *American City and County* said two "can live cheaply as one" by combining city and county governments? <sup>4</sup>

The emerging issue of this paper will focus on the total consolidation of multiple small urban agencies to provide police service, and the hopes that it becomes a plan for consolidation of all government services provided by small urban municipalities. According to Eileen Shannon, writing for *Governing Magazine*, the trend of "Metropolitan Government" is emerging as a means to provide regional solutions for local problems.<sup>5</sup>

## **BACKGROUND**

Providing police service to a small urban community has become increasingly difficult. Cities in the Southeast portion of Los Angeles County have been hit by revenue shortfalls over the past decade. The area is plagued with a high crime rate and sales tax revenues have declined 20% according to Chamber of Commerce figures. Liability issues have driven the cost of providing police service "through the roof" according to Bell City Manger Robert Rizzo.

The Southeast area also has a large number of undocumented aliens with a 1990 census population of 87% Hispanic. According to the *Kliplinger California Letter* , by the year 2005, California estimates are for a population nearly 30% Hispanic, 7.7% African Americans, 11.4% Asians (and other groups), and 49.5% Whites.

Politicians and city managers have been discussing consolidating services for the past decade. Political leaders have been reluctant in the past to discuss it further. The economic forecast of the future brings consolidation back to the forefront with a renewed interest as a means for providing police service in the future.

Prior studies by Command College students and others have focused on two agency consolidation or merger by Sheriff's Departments or a large agency. Several studies have consolidated communications services in California like the Orange County model for fire and police service called "Control One".

The traditional response is for each individual city to provide police service to their "own" community. As an alternative several

cities have utilized the county sheriff's department to provide law enforcement service on a contract basis. In 1954, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department became the pioneer of "Contract Law Enforcement" according to Los Angeles County Sheriff Sherman Block in his report to the LA County Board of Supervisors<sup>6</sup>, by providing police service to the newly incorporated City Of Lakewood.

Regionalization was the first form of consolidation used by police agencies as a forum to provide better service to a particular area. This concept began with communications centers and training centers, and has expanded to special enforcement task forces like gangs and narcotics. Regionalization has proven effective in providing quality service at a reduced cost by better utilization of resources.

Private industry has used merger and consolidation for decades as means of streamlining operations and maximizing profits. Recent efforts have been more of a hostile takeover, rather than consolidation efforts.

The aerospace industry has taken a second look at consolidation and is moving cautiously. Anthony Velocci, writing for *Aviation Week and Space Technology* said "the consolidation outlook was stormy for the aerospace industry."<sup>7</sup>

The emerging problem of providing police service to small cities with limited resources is the future concern this research will address. Small agencies have been affected by downsizing or right sizing. The economic picture of Los Angeles County is bleak. Community policing efforts are slow to take hold as crime rates

require patrol officers to focus on emergency calls for service, with little time to utilize community policing methods.

### **ALARMING TRENDS**

The ability to provide quality police service at an affordable price will continue to be the focus of city management into the next century and beyond. Furthermore, if the following three significant trends continue to emerge at their current rate, the future of providing police service will become even more challenging. The greatest challenge will be to small urban police agencies of fewer than fifty personnel, lacking the diverse resources of larger cities.

#### **Trend 1 Level of Government Funding**

The first alarming trend is the level of state money available to fund local county and city police service. These funds include the amount of tax, license fees, and other general fund monies available to city government on a yearly basis. The level of funding from Government dictates how much local money is needed to finance municipal services. Police service is traditionally the highest priced municipal service. Fiscal resources are believed to have the most impact on the level of police service a city can provide.

#### **Trend 2 - Level of Illegal Immigration-**

This trend deals with the number of documented and estimated undocumented aliens, the number of Hispanic, Asian, and European

illegal individuals working and/or residing in California, specifically in the greater Los Angeles basin. Fiscal resources are currently divided based on census population figures which do not capture undocumented aliens.

### Trend 3- Level of Political Resistance to Consolidation

Each municipal city has its own governing body i.e. city council that governs the city. Each council wants to maintain their power and control over local issues. Local politicians will be reluctant to yield that control to a consolidated effort. Without political support, a consolidation program can not succeed.

### DRIVING FORCES

Consolidation as a means of providing police service to multiple small urban agencies has been discussed for the past decade. The future of consolidation appears to be driven by three identified forces.

The first driving force is the **economic** issue. The cost of providing service within declining budgets was first and foremost in any discussion of consolidating services. If an agency could afford to provide adequate service, it would not consider consolidation in any form. Current and future managers agree that small agency budgets will not be able to provide an adequate level of service at their current rate of city income. The future of small agency funding is not forecasted as improving. The level of general fund money devoted to police service, particularly by small cities, usually occupies a large portion of the total

city budget. A survey of small urban agencies in the southeast portion of Los Angeles county revealed a ratio of 80-90% of the total city budget allocated for police service. The size of State and Federal budgets also drives the level service provided by cities through grant money or community development funds.

The second driving force is the level of **political resistance to consolidation**. The political will of each city council's elected officials is to maintain control over local issues. The consolidation of multiple small agencies into one is viewed by local politicians as "losing control". However, maximizing resources and streamlining operations is the current trend in government operations. Federal, State, and local governments are all downsizing and sharing resources more than ever before. Local politicians are finding themselves caught in the middle of opposing forces to provide adequate service while maximizing resources. Employee groups are also divided on this issue with rigid union members not supporting consolidation and others seeing opportunity for expansion in the work place. Community groups also find themselves on both pro and con sides of the issue. Taxpayers want the best service available without increased taxes and look to local politicians to provide the best use of resources.

The last driving force is the issue of **community needs**. The residents, business people, and city employees as potential stakeholders in any consolidation effort. Each city in the consolidation area has its own unique needs that must be addressed by the new agency. The ideal situation would consolidate cities with similar demographics

whose geographic borders abut each other. The level of crime in each city must be addressed by the new agency. Two adjoining cities of equal size and population may have different levels of crime making the approach to providing service to both communities different. Community pride and "ownership" in their individual police departments also impacts the implementation of a metropolitan agency. Each community within the metropolitan area has pride in how their community functions and "their" police department is part of that pride. Community Based Policing programs already in place in the individual cities must be tailored to meet the needs of the new agency while still maintaining its effectiveness. The formation of a metropolitan agency would not prevent community policing programs from being successful.

### **STRATEGIES**

Any discussion of possibly forming a metropolitan police agency, especially from several smaller agencies, always focuses on the burning question of "how would you do it?". In researching the issue of consolidation, forecasting methods identified alternative strategies for providing police service in the future. The strategies included developing alternative funding sources to pay for police service, reducing service levels to meet existing budgets, contract service with other agencies, and consolidation of service at various levels. The most possible strategy in terms of happening in the foreseeable future was to gradual consolidation of services between multiple

agencies with the ultimate goal of a metropolitan police agency. The balance of this article will focus on that strategy and how to manage the transition into the new agency.

All those consulted during the research agreed that maintaining the status quo would not work. Struggling from year to year with declining budgets was becoming more and more difficult. Of the strategies presented during the research, the consolidation in phases was the “most likely” future for small agencies. For the purpose of this article, we will assume the decision has been made to form a metropolitan agency, but where do you begin?

### **BUILDING A FOUNDATION**

The first step towards the new agency is establishing the foundation from which to build. Several alternatives were examined, however the Joint Powers Authority (JPA) was selected for several reasons. The two most important are as follows. First, it provides equal representation from all project cities by its very design. Secondly, it has a proven track record with multi agency task forces already in place with the project cities. The JPA then becomes the “contract” that binds the project cities together. The metropolitan agency then becomes the “metropolitan police authority” and begins its new life. It is suggested that the transition into the new agency occur in phases with evaluation after each phase. The plan is outlined as follows.

## **TRANSITION MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE**

An organization moving from its current state to the “desired future” requires a management structure to manage the transition. In the strategy of consolidation, the needs of one of the area organization may not be necessary in the metropolitan one. The reverse is also true with the needs of the new agency radically different than a smaller organization. The gap between the current and future management structure requires a temporary structure known as the transitional management structure.

The transitional management structure selected to guide multiple small police agencies into a consolidated effort will be headed by a project manager who will interact with the newly formed police commission. The project manager should be someone who has the trust and respect of area police agencies, perhaps a recently retired or soon to retire executive or manager from one of the involved agencies. The police commission will be formed by the joint powers agreement between the project cities. Each project city would have one person on the commission to provide each city equal voice and address their concerns for local control.

The consolidation of multiple services by multiple agencies affects a wide variety groups which require representation in the anticipated change. In order to allow each of these groups to participate equally, a task force approach is required, working directly for the program manger. The task force will use sub-committees to accomplish specific parts of the desired change.

The sub-committees allow the program manager time to devote to those identified as needing to be in the "make change happen" category to guarantee their support for the project.

A Finance Sub-Committee should be formed to identify and obtain funding sources to initiate the desired change. Obtaining current financial resources from the multiple agencies will serve as a baseline from which to build the metropolitan agency operating budget. Members of the finance committee would come from the existing finance departments of the project cities especially from these cities already experienced in consolidation efforts.

Two other sub-committees are desirable to round out the temporary organization. The first would be responsible for program development. This sub-committee will concentrate on the development of a mission statement, addressing the needs of internal and external forces. During the initial stages of program development, concerted effort should be made to remain focused on specific phases of consolidation.

The second sub-committee required would be responsible for administrative functions including technical research, personnel and logistics. This sub-committee would also evaluate existing facilities and equipment to identify assets already built into the project.

## **TECHNOLOGIES AND METHODS TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION**

Changing the method of delivery of police service by multiple small agencies is a radical departure from the current model. To

manage this change effectively, several technologies and methods are available to facilitate the implementation of that change. Any change brings about confusion and resistance. Using the right tools can reduce the anxiety associated with change and support the implementation of the desired strategy. The following tools should be used by the task force to address the issue of consolidation of police services.

- **Team Building Workshops** - Members of multiple agencies will be coming together to work on consolidation of services. Different policies and procedures coming in from five different police departments have a potential for conflict. A facilitator trained in conflict resolution should be used at the onset. This would open lines of communication, build relationships and trust among task force members who may or may not already know each other, and help develop a positive working environment.
- **Computer Network System** - Ongoing communication between task force members is critical to avoid duplication of effort and to keep the project moving forward. The quickest and most effective way for members to communicate is by a Local Area Network (LAN) or electronic mail system (e-mail) between the five agencies involved in the project. Face to face meetings would then be more productive as meetings could deal with final discussions and decision making. Preliminary work would have to be done via computer.
- **Community Outreach** - The community residents have already been identified as part of the critical mass. The voting public could

ultimately decide the success or failure of the project if voter approval was required. Getting the public's initial reaction to consolidating services can identify what areas need further effort. Public meetings to explain the project could enhance support and solve problems before the strategy goes on the ballot.

- **Cost Analysis** - Economic issues were the driving force behind looking at consolidation as a method to solve the problem of how to provide service. A true cost analysis of operations by combining resources will be used by supporters as an educational tool, a lobbying tool, and a point to highlight during a ballot campaign.
- **Campaigning** - If voter approval is required to implement the desired change, then the task force is compelled to campaign for its success. Presentations to service groups, homeowner associations, etc. will be required to get the word out to the voters. Community "lobbyists" like crime prevention programs should be briefed on the project to allow them to become spokes people for change.
- **Responsibility Chart** - The task force will contain a large number of people from five individual police agencies. Members will bring their department's skills, strengths, procedures, and commitment level. Various services will be looked at for possible consolidation requiring specific areas of responsibility assigned to each task force member.
- **Evaluation and Progress Reports** - The suggested strategy calls for consolidation in phases, starting with certain services first i.e. communications. Evaluation after each phase is critical to further

consolidation of services including the formation of a new metropolitan agency. Evaluation criteria will include increase or decrease levels of service, cost factors, and efficiency levels.

### **TRANSITION MANAGEMENT PLAN OUTLINE/TIMETABLE**

The following time/task outline depicts the major tasks necessary to be accomplished in order to implement the desired strategy.

#### **YEAR 1 - Phase 1**

##### Month 1

1. Strategic Plan is adopted by area City Councils.
2. Police Commission is formed by area City Councils.
3. Project Manger selected by Commission.
4. Membership in task force is solicited.

##### Months 2-12

1. Task force members are chosen.
2. Task force meets and agrees on policies and procedures.
3. Timeline established.
4. Community outreach begins.
5. Cost analysis begins.
6. Computer network system operational.
7. Evaluation of phase 1 report compiled.

#### **YEAR 2 - Phase 2**

##### Months 12-24

1. Finance and program development sub-committees formed.
2. Lobbying efforts begin.
3. Administrative sub-committee formed.
4. Communication systems consolidated.
5. Evaluation of phase 2 report compiled.

### **YEAR 3 - Phase 3**

Months 24-36

1. Records systems consolidated.
2. Voter initiative process for "police authority" begins.
3. Ongoing efforts to promote strategy by Commission/Manager.
4. Evaluation of phase 3 report compiled, recommending further consolidation.

### **YEAR 4 - Phase 4**

Months 36-48

1. Campaigning for passage of "police authority" initiative continues.
2. Jail systems consolidated.
3. Evaluation of phase 4 report compiled, recommending further consolidation.

### **YEAR 5 on - Phase 5**

Months 48 on

1. Voter initiative passes creating "police authority".
2. Task force downsized as new executive staff developed.
3. Management staff identified.

4. Existing facilities and equipment retrofitted to accommodate metropolitan agency.
5. Metropolitan agency established and "on line".
6. Continued evaluation and progress tracked.
7. Final report on project completed.

### **OBSTACLES TO IMPLEMENTATION**

During the implementation of any substantive change, an organization will have to overcome obstacles. This particular strategy takes place over several years making it more susceptible to obstacles. Two obstacles to be overcome were identified in all phases of this research as critical to the success of the project. First, the five year plus time line for implementation and the ability to maintain interest in the project is a primary obstacle for the task force to overcome. The second deals with obstacles brought forth by opponents and critics of the desired change.

The transition management plan gave a possible timeline for total consolidation of five years or more. The first actual consolidation of communication services occurs in year three. Some members of the critical mass are elected officials whose tenure may or may not last the life of the timeline. New elected officials could enter into the picture in year four, and oppose further consolidation or progress with the project. The public must view the project with significant importance, and maintain their interest through the next election process. Absent a recall effort, or some special problem arising, area

politicians usually remain in office for more than one term. This is sufficient time to complete the transition, providing the politician support the project. Having a program manager that is not an elected official will ensure continuity throughout the project. Public education and awareness of the project must be at a peak during the election process.

The opponents to the project identified within the critical mass as initially in the “block change from happening” category can traditionally stop a project before its completely implemented. The police labor groups and community residents each have their own agendas to satisfy. The basic premise of each group is the protection of interests for their membership/citizens. The project should address these concerns early on gathering input from both groups during phase 1 of the project. Perhaps having both groups represented on the task force will ensure their support for the project.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Research clearly indicates that the future of funding law enforcement service, especially by small municipalities, is in jeopardy. Several strategies were examined to provide possible solutions, with no one strategy identified as the panacea. The one clear message was that the status quo would not prevail in the not too distant future, making planning for that future a critical issue today. Consolidation was viewed as a viable alternative to providing police service albeit not

the perfect solution. Law enforcement needs to constantly evaluate how they do business. Community based policing models are changing the way law enforcement operates. Fiscal constraints compel law enforcement to “do more with less”. Providing quality police service, at an affordable price, that meets the needs of the community is our greatest challenge today, and in the future.

The key to success is the method in which law enforcement responds to this challenge. The impact of consolidating police service delivery by multiple small urban law enforcement agencies was the focus of the research. The following recommendations were based on the information gathered during the study of this issue.

To better provide police service, especially to small urban communities, law enforcement should:

- Constantly re-evaluate their operation to ensure effectiveness in and out of the organization.
- Adopt or endorse existing community based policing methods to address community problems.
- Look outside the police facility or city limits to address problems or provide service.
- Create public/private partnerships with organizations interested in conducting research and/or developing technology to assist in joining satellite facilities together.

- Monitor government and/or private industry in their problem solving and management strategies rather than traditional law enforcement's response to problems.

In conclusion, the threat of providing quality police service with declining budgets is not strictly a "police problem". Solving the problem is a group effort that should enhance the relationship between the police and the public they serve.

### **Future Recommendations**

Further research in this area is warranted. The concept of metropolitan government is not exclusive to the United States. Police in England and other countries work on a statewide basis. Law enforcement models from other countries should be thoroughly examined to identify operational methods that would improve our system. Technology should be applied to law enforcement where ever possible to relieve the police officer of clerical duties and focus on crime issues. We must look beyond our own backyard for solutions to future problems.

## ENDNOTES

1. Neal Peirce, *Twin Cities: A regional leader again?* (Nation's Cities Weekly August 29, 1994) p. 2.
2. Bill Barnes, *Beyond perplexity: Metropolitan Governance in the 1990's* (Nation's Cities Weekly January 3, 1994) p. 4.
3. Ana Marie Walsh, *The Urban Challenge to Government* ( American City & County February 93) p.36.
4. Janet Ward, *Can Two Live as Cheaply as One* (American City & County February 92) p.30.
5. Eileen Shanahan, *Going it Jointly: regional solutions for local problems* (Governing August 1991) p.70.
6. Sheriff Sherman Block, *Contract Law Enforcement Program* ( Contract Law Enforcement January 1994) p.3.
7. Anthony L. Velocci, *Consolidation Outlook Stormy* ( Aviation Week & Space Technology March 14, 1994) p.42.