



Memorandum

TO: PUBLIC SAFETY, FINANCE, &
STRATEGIC SUPPORT COMMITTEE

FROM: Robert Sapient, Jr.

SUBJECT: FIRE DEPARTMENT EMERGENCY
RESPONSE TIMES PERFORMANCE
ANNUAL REPORT

DATE: October 7, 2021

Approved

Date

10/14/2021

RECOMMENDATION

Accept the annual report on Fire Department emergency response times performance metrics and progress on response times performance improvement strategies through the end of 2020-2021.

BACKGROUND

As specified in the Public Safety, Finance, and Strategic Support Committee (Committee) Work Plan, the Fire Department is to provide a written annual report regarding emergency response time performance and progress on response time performance improvement strategies contained in the Fire Department Response Time Work Plan. The previous report was accepted by the Committee on October 15, 2020¹.

Building upon the Response Time Work Plan presented to the Committee on June 19, 2014, the Department continues to advance strategies for maximizing response time performance. This report provides a status of the Department's current response times, as well as updates on ongoing response time performance improvement projects and strategies.

ANALYSIS

Response Times (City and County EMS):

Department response times are measured against two performance measures: the City of San José's (City) adopted performance measures and the performance measures in the Santa Clara County (County) Emergency Medical Services (EMS) agreement.

¹ [*PSFSS October 15, 2020: Fire Department Emergency Response Times Performance Annual Report*](#)

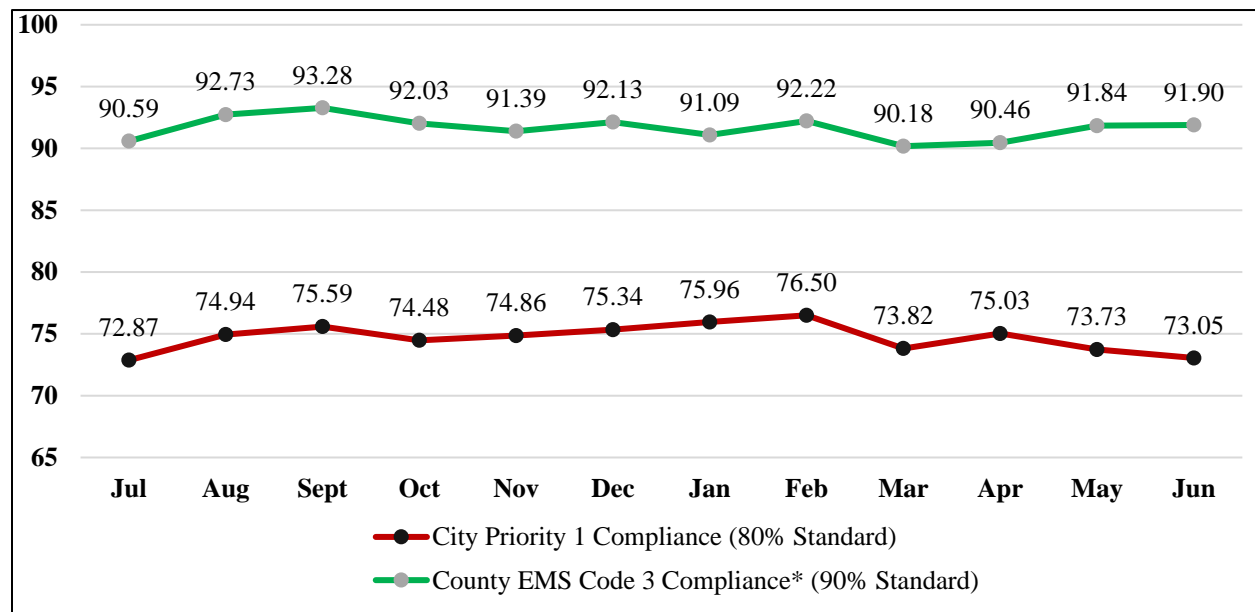
City: In order to effectively respond to emergency calls for service (both fires and medical services) the City revised its response time performance standard in 2000 to arrival within eight minutes 80 percent of the time for Priority 1 incidents, and arrival within 13 minutes 80 percent of the time for Priority 2 incidents. Priority 1 incidents are those emergency incidents that are determined to require immediate response with response vehicles using lights and sirens. Priority 2 incidents are those emergency incidents that are determined to require immediate response without the use of lights and sirens. Under the City Standard, the time clock begins upon receipt of the 9-1-1 call and stops upon arrival at the incident address.

County EMS Contract Provision: The 9-1-1 Emergency Medical Services Provider Agreement between the City and the County establishes response time requirements for two emergency vehicle response modes: with red lights and sirens or without red lights and sirens. 9-1-1 calls are triaged by public safety radio dispatchers utilizing the Medical Priority Dispatch System (MPDS). Resulting determinates (Omega, Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, Delta, Echo) inform field resources of the appropriate response mode. Lights and sirens responses require arrival on scene within eight minutes, 90 percent of the time, in all EMS calls in urban areas (commonly referred to as the County EMS Code 3 Standard). Lower level EMS incidents require arrival on scene within 13 minutes, 90 percent of the time, in urban areas. Under the County EMS response time standard, the time clock begins upon dispatch of response resources and stops upon arrival at the incident address.

The agreement with the County includes response time performance “exceptions” for responses outside of the County’s defined Exclusive Operating Area (EOA) and designated “hard to serve areas.” The County may also waive response time performance requirements when the response network is under unusual pressure, such as during periods of time when greater alarms are occurring or when the Department is providing mutual aid to other jurisdictions. During such exception periods, Department response times not meeting the County EMS Code 3 Standard are excluded from the County EMS Code 3 response time calculations.

Response Time (City and County EMS):

Chart 1 shows the Department's monthly response time performance for Fiscal Year (FY) 2019-2020.

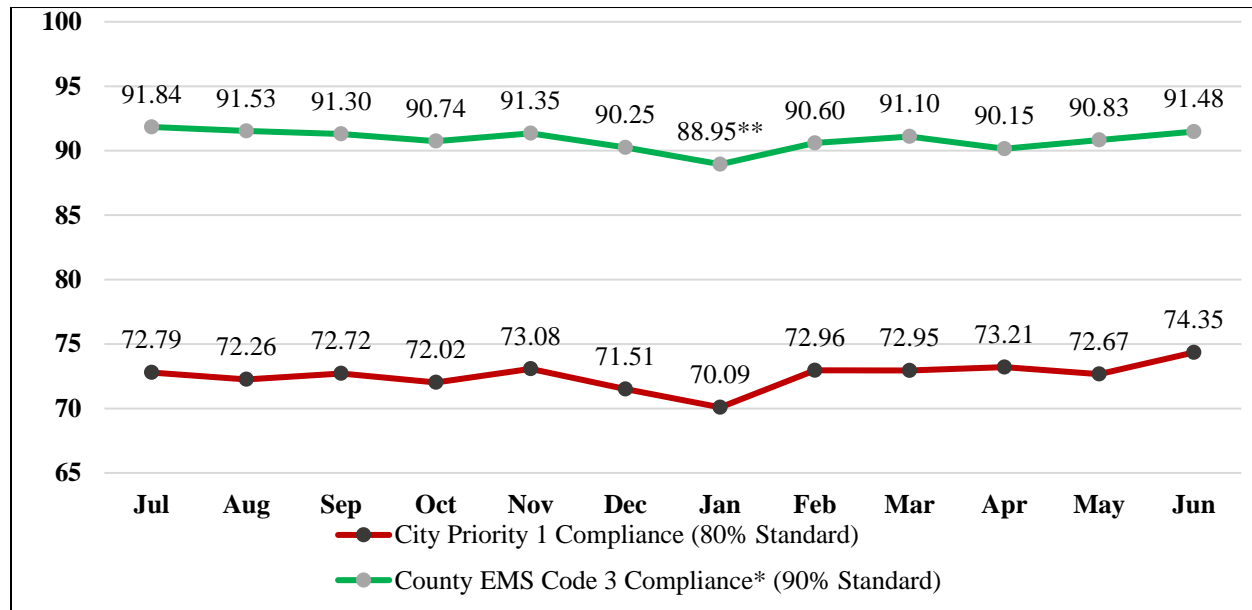
Chart 1: FY 2019-2020 Response Time Performance

**Compliance standard reflects performance reported to County EMS adjusted for allowable exemptions*

During the FY 2019-2020, the Department response times averaged:

- City Standard: 74.68 percent, or 5.32 basis points below the City Standard of 8 minutes 80 percent of the time, for Priority 1 calls.
- County Standard: 91.65 percent, or 1.65 basis points above the County EMS Code 3 Standard of 8 minutes 90 percent of the time.

Chart 2 shows the Department's monthly response time performance for FY 2020-2021.

Chart 2: FY 2020-2021 Response Time Performance

*Compliance standard reflects performance reported to County EMS adjusted for allowable exemptions.

** COVID-19 hospitalizations peaked in January 2021 resulting in delayed ambulance response times. Ambulance response delays adversely impacted Fire Department resource availability and response time performance. After further reconciliation with SCC EMS, January 2021 adjusted performance was 90.53%.

During the FY 2020-2021, the Department response times averaged:

- City Standard: 72.55 percent, or 7.45 basis points below the City Standard of 8 minutes 80 percent of the time, for Priority 1 calls.
- County Standard: 90.84 percent, or 0.84 basis points above the County EMS Code 3 Standard of 8 minutes 90 percent of the time.

The Department has met the County EMS Code 3 response time requirement of 8 minutes, 90% of the time for 39 consecutive months since April 2018.

Response Time Segments

The Department's response times are broken down into three segments: alarm processing time, turnout time, and travel time. The Priority 1 standard is 8 minutes, 80% of the time. The 8 minute target includes 2 minutes for alarm processing, 2 minutes for turnout, and 4 minutes for travel time. The Department meets alarm processing and turnout time standards more than 80% of the time, however, the 4 minute travel time target is met less than 50% of the time.

Alarm processing begins when a 9-1-1 call is received into the Fire Communications Center (FCC) and assigned to a call taker. Most calls are transferred to the FCC from Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) that include San José Police, Santa Clara County Communications,

California Highway Patrol, and others. In FY 2019-2020, the Department achieved four improvements that will have a positive impact on alarm processing time including an improved Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system to CAD link between the City and County Communications Centers, diversion of non-emergency calls from the FCC to San José 3-1-1, “off-hook” answering technology, and new fire station alerting systems. The CAD to CAD link improvement results in a reduction of tens of thousands of telephone calls between the Centers annually, while increasing dispatcher availability. Similarly, the diversion of non-emergency calls to San José 3-1-1 also increases 9-1-1 dispatcher availability. Off-hook answering automatically opens the line between the caller and available 9-1-1 dispatcher, eliminating ring time and dispatcher reaction time. The new fire station alerting system utilizes a computerized voice and can reduce alarm processing time by simultaneously dispatching calls. Prior to this implementation, dispatches had to occur in sequence to wait for dispatcher and radio channel availability.

Turnout time is measured from the point that a unit is notified of an incident to the time the unit initiated response (travel). Turnout time entails personnel stopping active activities, walking to the emergency vehicle, donning appropriate personal protective equipment based upon call type, mounting apparatus and securing seat belts. Response time performance data is shared with field personnel during each 48-hour work tour and company, and shift specific turnout time performance is shared twice per month with field supervisors.

As previously noted, travel time is the Department’s principal challenge to on time response performance. Distance between fire stations, unit out-of-service time, traffic congestion, and high call volume each play a role in challenging travel time performance. To begin to close distance between fire stations and increase resourcing, the City is currently advancing new fire station building projects enabled by the 2018 Disaster Preparedness, Public Safety, and Infrastructure Bond Measure (Measure T), and is leveraging the Fire Station 20 replacement project at Mineta San José International Airport to include an outward-facing fire apparatus bay that will create a new response area around the airfield. Fire Station 20 construction is currently underway with completion targeted for late 2021. The Department has worked to minimize unit out-of-service time by utilizing overtime to conduct training and other administrative details during scheduled off-duty time and/or to backfill resources that are out of service for training. Traffic congestion challenges were improved in 2018 with the implementation of Emergency Vehicle Preemption (EVP). The implementation of EVP resulted in 948 intersection traffic signal lights preempting to green when emergency vehicles are passing through. The result has been improved response time performance and safer roadways for responders and civilians.

Emergency Incident Volume

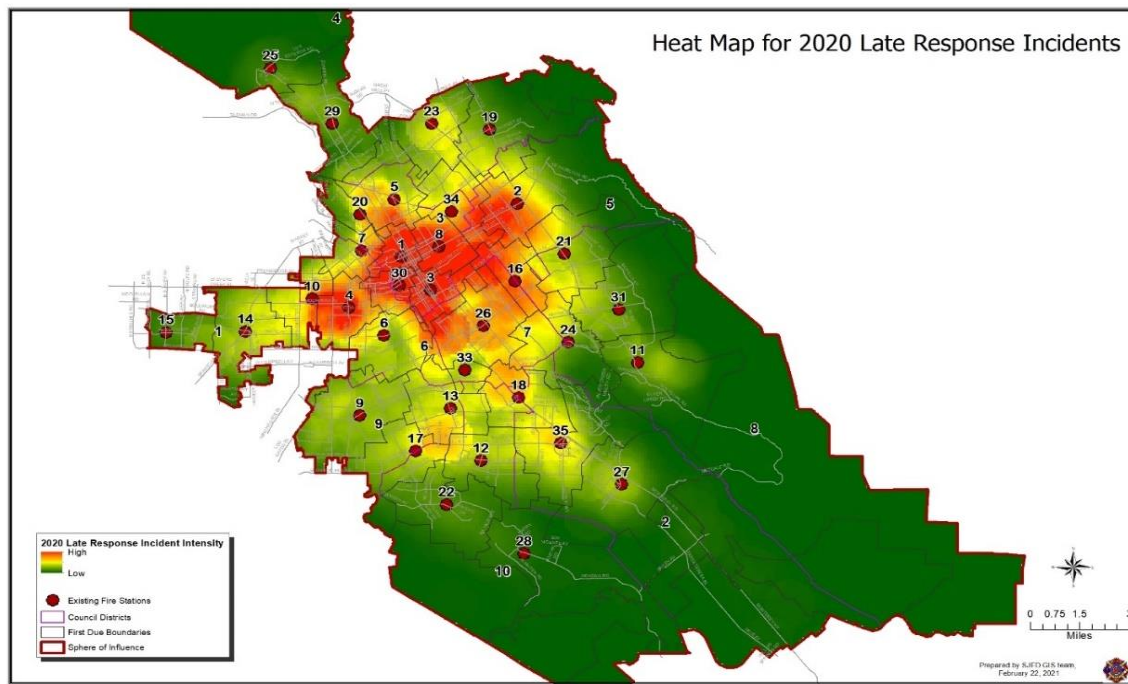
In FY 2020-2021 the Department responded to 94,784 incidents which is a 4.3% increase from 90,869 incidents in FY 2016-2017 as indicated in Table 1 below. In the prior 5-year period, incidents increased over 63% from 51,349 in FY 2011-2012 to 83,600 in FY 2015-2016. Despite a ten-year incident volume increase of over 85%, the Department currently operates out of one less fire station than in FY 2009-2010.

Table 1: Annual Incident Volume

	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021
Total Incidents	90,869	92,587	91,901	91,595	94,784

Increased call volume results in more instances where the first due response resource is unavailable to respond. Second and third due resources require additional travel time to arrive at scene, and thus response times are longer. Peak call volume periods and large scale incidents requiring multiple unit response stretch the Department's resource network thinly and results in reduced response time performance. The peak of COVID-19 cases in January 2021 added additional strain on the responses and performance time. Fire resources were committed on scene longer, waiting for ambulances that were delayed due to longer processing times admitting patients to hospitals that had limited space for the ill.

Chart 3 shows responses on a Heat Map where travel time was greater than 4-minutes. Red areas indicate the greatest number of late responses and green the lowest number of late responses. Although fire stations are closer together in the core of the city, the high number of incidents results in an increased number of late responses as previously explained. This 2018 chart aided in the placement and prioritization of new fire stations.

Chart 3: Travel Time Performance (Greater than 4-Minutes)

In November 2018, San José voters passed Measure T: Disaster Preparedness, Public Safety, and Infrastructure Bond which will enable construction of new Fire Stations 32, 36, and 37. Fire

Station 32 which will be built near McLaughlin Ave. and Story Rd., Fire Station 36 near McLaughlin Ave. and Capitol Expy., and Fire Station 37 on Lincoln Ave. near Curtner Ave. Fire Station 37 construction has begun and is expected to be placed into service in early 2022. Measure T will also enable the replacement of Fire Stations 8 and 23 which will be placed at locations that will further improve Department emergency response performance. The site location for Fire Station 8 was secured in February 2021 while the site for Fire Station 23 is under evaluation. Lastly, Measure T also provides funding for improvement of the Police and Fire Communications Center including expansion into space occupied by the Office of Emergency Management. Improvements to the physical space at Communications are expected to result in expanded capacity and improved integration of modern technologies to meet volume demands and support emerging 9-1-1 features.

The Department has taken some steps to moderate call volume through refinements in 9-1-1 call taker protocols and through targeted mitigation of high call volume locations where Department resources are not the ideal or needed resource. An effective 9-1-1 call taker protocol included a division of “person down” calls distinguishing between a law enforcement only response or law enforcement and fire response to provide emergency medical services care. This action eliminated several hundred unnecessary Department responses per year. Mitigating targeted high call volume addresses, such as the Santa Clara County Main Jail Complex has involved collaboration with facilities to provide education, identify better options, and improve work flows to eliminate unnecessary and/or accidental triggering of a 9-1-1 system response. The Department will continue to pursue these opportunities as they arise.

Status of the Response Time Work Plan

The Department continues to advance multiple response time improvement strategies included in the Response Time Work Plan.

Table 2 provides an update on “in process” action items from the Fire Department’s Response Time Work Plan:

Table 2: Response Time Work Plan (*In Process*)

#	Project	Comments
2	Data Collection <i>Status: In Process</i> <i>Timeline: Ongoing</i> <i>Segment: Overall</i>	This effort seeks to increase the storage and scope of electronic data collection to enhance analytical capabilities to improve response times. Data informing on call processing, turnout time, and travel time performance is in production. Additional quantitative and qualitative data is being identified for incorporation into the data warehouse and business intelligence tool.

3	<p>Business Intelligence Tool</p> <p><i>Status: In Process</i> <i>Timeline: Ongoing</i> <i>Segment: Overall</i></p>	<p>These tools provide reports and user interfaces (“dashboards”) that direct organizational focus on performance driven by actionable data. These tools were implemented in December 2018. The Department is currently benefitting from generated initial products and continues to add and enhance reports.</p>
8	<p>Fire Communications Staffing</p> <p><i>Status: In Process</i> <i>Timeline: June 2022</i> <i>Segment: Call Processing Time</i></p>	<p>At the end of FY 2020-2021, there were 7.48 vacancies in Fire Communications. Recruitment efforts and training academies are ongoing. The 2019-2020 Adopted Operating Budget added one-time funding to conduct a staffing study. An agreement with a consultant was executed in September 2020. The consultant has delivered a draft report which is under review by the Fire Department and City Manager’s Office.</p>
9	<p>Response Area Mapping/ESZ Refinement</p> <p><i>Status: In Process</i> <i>Timeline: Ongoing</i> <i>Segment: Call Processing Time</i></p>	<p>Ongoing refinement of Emergency Service Zone (ESZ) assignments to ensure appropriate resources (station/apparatus) are dispatched. Most recent changes, including many to prepare for the upcoming opening of new fire stations 20 (landside) and 37, were implemented in July 2021. Additional changes are in testing.</p>
10	<p>Base Map Update</p> <p><i>Status: In Process</i> <i>Timeline: Ongoing</i> <i>Segment: Call Processing Time</i></p>	<p>Provide periodic updates to base map data for integration (“map roll”) into CAD. The Department is evaluating opportunities for a countywide base map which could support multiple strategies.</p>
14	<p>CAD to CAD Dispatch Link(s)</p> <p><i>Status: In Process</i> <i>Timeline: TBD</i> <i>Segment: Call Processing and Travel Time</i></p>	<p>Connect the Fire Department CAD system with other County agencies to share unit and event information. This includes redesign of the CAD to CAD interface with Santa Clara County Communications to include unit data. Unit data is not exchanged via the current interface. This project will be reinitiated once Santa Clara County Communications completes its transition to the Hexagon CAD system.</p>

15	<p>Border Drops</p> <p><i>Status: On Hold</i> <i>Timeline: TBD</i> <i>Segment: Call Process and Travel Time</i></p>	Enhance auto-aid agreements to create borderless response areas. This project is dependent on CAD to CAD links and agency agreements and may require countywide GIS coordination.
17	<p>Resource Move-Ups</p> <p><i>Status: In Process</i> <i>Timeline: Ongoing</i> <i>Segment: Travel Time</i></p>	Resource move-ups continue as a manual process at Fire Communications and by request from Battalion Chiefs. As the Department moves toward closest unit dispatch, automated resource deployment software solutions will be evaluated.
18	<p>Closest Unit Dispatch</p> <p><i>Status: In Process</i> <i>Timeline: Fall 2022</i> <i>Segment: Travel Time</i></p>	This effort would dispatch resources based upon apparatus proximity to the incident rather than station location. The Department is assessing time and support requirements for completion of policy work, configuration of the Hexagon CAD system, reliability of cellular network, and providing system redundancy.
19	<p>Navigation Technology</p> <p><i>Status: In Process</i> <i>Timeline: Ongoing</i> <i>Segment: Call Processing and Travel Time</i></p>	The Department continues to refine routing effectiveness on new CAD and mobile data computer (MDC) systems. iPads and updated hard-copy maps continue to provide interim improved routing capabilities. The next updates to the MDC maps are expected in mid-2022.
21	<p>Deployment Refinements</p> <p><i>Status: In Process</i> <i>Timeline: Ongoing</i> <i>Segment: Travel Time</i></p>	The Department continues to pursue opportunities to address service gap areas identified through the Organizational Review process. This includes real time move-ups, backfill for training, augmented staffing levels for high fire danger periods, mutual aid and special events.
22	<p>Expand Omega Protocol</p> <p><i>Status: In Process</i> <i>Timeline: December 2022</i> <i>Segment: Overall</i></p>	The Department is presently engaged in discussions with the County EMS Medical Director to evaluate opportunities for special studies and/or response protocols to expand application of the Omega triage determinant. Additionally, discussions have expanded to include opportunities to reduce 9-1-1 system burden from low acuity EMS service requests from high call volume facilities.

Table 3 provides an update on completed action items from the Fire Department's Response Time Work Plan:

Table 3: Response Time Work Plan (*Completed*)

1	Analyze/Validate Response Time Data/Determine Impact on Response Performance <i>Status: Completed</i> <i>Segment: Overall</i>	The Department provided the San José Fire Department Response Time Performance Initial Analysis in April 2014 with third-party methodology review and validation by Athena Advanced Networks. This process is now ongoing and is the source of data cited in this report. The Department will monitor CAD upgrade impacts to ensure continuity of data reporting procedures.
4	Data Warehouse <i>Status: Completed</i> <i>Timeline: *Ongoing</i> <i>Segment: Overall</i>	This tool centralizes data from multiple sources and would be the data source for reporting and business intelligence tools. This item was implemented in December 2018.
5	Enable Intergraph iTracker ("Halo") <i>Status: Completed</i> <i>Segment: Turnout and Travel Time</i>	This feature records en-route and on-scene information utilizing the Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL) system. iTracker can provide greater data reliability than manual entry via MDC performed by response personnel. This item was completed in January 2018.
6	Implement Early Dispatch <i>Status: Completed</i> <i>Segment: Call Processing Time</i>	In March 2014, the Department eliminated "station pre-alerts" and adopted "early dispatch" procedures for EMS responses to improve dispatch time. As a result, all EMS dispatches became code-3 until completion of Emergency Medical Dispatch (EMD) triage. This procedure results in simultaneous dispatch of Squads, with the appropriate resource continued upon completion of triage. Emergency Fire Dispatch (EFD) procedures were also refined on August 1, 2016.
7	9-1-1 Phone System Upgrade <i>Status: Completed</i> <i>Segment: Call Processing Time</i>	New system hardware installation was completed in June 2016 and system training (Power MIS) was completed in September 2016. Installation of system monitoring hardware in the control room was completed in March 2018.

11	<p>EMS Quality Assurance Update</p> <p><i>Status: Completed</i> <i>Timeline: *Ongoing</i> <i>Segment: Call Processing Time</i></p>	<p>Training was completed in July 2016 and software and protocols upgraded August 1, 2016. This process recurs with software and protocol updates and upgrades.</p>
12	<p>Organizational Review</p> <p><i>Status: Completed</i> <i>Segment: Overall</i></p>	<p>Report accepted, along with the Department Strategic Business Plan, in June 2016</p>
13	<p>Turnout Time</p> <p><i>Status: Completed</i> <i>Segment: Turnout Time</i></p>	<p>Performance data isolating turnout time performance is provided to field personnel bi-monthly. Daily turnout time performance reports have been deployed in the Business Intelligence Tools.</p>
16	<p>Traffic Signal Preemption (Emergency Vehicle Preemption, EVP)</p> <p><i>Status: Completed</i> <i>Segment: Travel Time</i></p>	<p>This effort expands traffic signal preemption more broadly across the City. The Department worked with Police Department Communications, Information Technology Department, and Department of Transportation to leverage their systems to significantly expand signal preemption. The system was fully deployed in December 2018 with a total of 948 intersections.</p>
20	<p>Unit Availability</p> <p><i>Status: Completed</i> <i>Segment: Travel Time</i></p>	<p>The Department has implemented various strategies to reduce unit out of service time including adjusted training scheduling and conducting administrative details on and off duty on an overtime basis. Backfill resources to cover staffing gaps created when companies are out-of-service for training, enabled by 2016-2017 Adopted Operating Budget action.</p>
23	<p>Station Alerting System</p> <p><i>Status: Completed</i> <i>Segment: Call Processing and Turnout Time</i></p>	<p>The 2016-2017 Adopted Operating Budget approved \$1.3 million to support the implementation of an upgraded station alerting system. The upgraded fire station alerting system automates some dispatching steps, resulting in reduced call processing times. In October 2017, Council approved a funding increase for a total \$1.5 million. This project was completed in August 2020 and the Department is in monitoring and maintenance mode.</p>

24	<p>Response to County Jail and County Facilities</p> <p><i>Status: Completed</i> <i>Timeline: Ongoing Monitoring</i> <i>Segment: Travel Time</i></p>	<p>In December 2014, Santa Clara County released a Limited Scope Management Audit of Emergency Medical Services Response Times which recommended that the County develop additional policies limiting when the County Jail and Valley Medical Center call 9-1-1 for assistance on medical emergencies based on the existence of trained medical personnel at those facilities. The County has initiated actions to reduce unnecessary 9-1-1 calls, and the Department continues to monitor County Jail facility call volume.</p>
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** Although the project is completed, the Department is continuously refining and adjusting to new developments as they occur.*

EVALUATION AND FOLLOW-UP

The Department will return to the Committee in Fall 2022 with its next annual report regarding emergency response time performance and progress on response time performance improvement strategies contained in the Fire Department Response Time Work Plan.

COORDINATION

This memorandum has been coordinated with the City Attorney's Office.

/s/
ROBERT SAPIEN, JR.
Fire Chief, Fire Department

For questions, please contact Robert Sapien, Jr., Fire Chief, at (408) 794-6952.