



# Memorandum

**TO:** PUBLIC SAFETY, FINANCE,  
AND STRATEGIC SUPPORT  
COMMITTEE **FROM:** Robert Sapien Jr.

**SUBJECT:** Fire Department Operations **DATE:** March 27, 2026  
**Annual Report**

Approved

Date: April 6, 2026

**COUNCIL DISTRICT:** Citywide

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Accept the annual report on Fire Department call volumes and emergency response times performance metrics.

## **BACKGROUND**

As specified in the Public Safety, Finance and Strategic Support Committee (Committee) Work Plan, the Fire Department (Department) is to provide a consolidated annual report on emergency response time performance, progress on the implementation of response time improvement strategies detailed in the Fire Department Response Time Work Plan, as well as an overview of the annual call volume activity. The report also includes recommendations for potential opportunities to triage service calls to optimize life-saving interventions and reduce the impact of fires. The Committee accepted the Department's annual operations report on April 30, 2025<sup>1</sup>. This iteration of the report offers a comprehensive assessment of the Department's operational performance, highlights emerging trends, and outlines enhancements to critical processes in support of the Department's mission to protect life, property, and the environment.

The Department is a high-volume, all-hazards fire department that provides fire suppression and rescue services, Advanced Life Support (ALS), and Basic Life Support (BLS) services, as well as specialized operations resources, including Urban Search and Rescue (US&R), Aircraft Rescue Fire Fighting (ARFF), and a Hazardous Incident

<sup>1</sup> <https://sanjose.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=14159796&GUID=C45445C0-02A9-4C4D-B19C-FE92F2970BCC>

Team (HIT). The Department deploys resources from 34 fire stations, with minimum daily staffing levels of 190 personnel operating on 34 Engine companies, nine Truck companies, three Rescue Medic units, and six on-duty command officers (Battalion Chiefs). The Department's frontline personnel protect 208.17 square miles, including 181.36 square miles within City of San José (City) limits and 26.81 square miles of unincorporated areas of Santa Clara County by contract.

The Department's emergency incident call volume has increased by approximately 41.1% in the past 10 years, from 83,632 calls in Fiscal Year (FY) 2014-2015 to 111,373 calls in FY 2024-2025. Rising call volume has challenged the Department's ability to meet response time performance standards and to maintain balanced emergency response coverage throughout the City.

On June 7, 2016, the City Council received the City of San José – Fire Department Organization Review<sup>2</sup> which included Standards of Response Coverage (SOC) analysis. The following was included in the report's findings:

*We find the City's deployment system does not provide City Council-adopted and best-practice desired response times, especially outside of the urban core as fire station spacing increases in the suburban areas. Delivering response times to all neighborhoods at the adopted City Goal will require additional resources.*

Consistent with the above conclusion, the City Council has been proactive and taken budget actions to restore some response resources lost following the 2008 recession. The first action taken was advancing the Disaster Preparedness, Public Safety, and Infrastructure Bond measure to the November 6, 2018, ballot. Voters passed the \$650,000,000 general obligation bond measure (Measure T), which included "...construction of Fire Station 37 and the upgrade and/or rebuild of additional fire stations to improve emergency response times based on the Fire Chief's assessment of projects that are critically needed to improve emergency response..."

Additionally, at the June 18, 2019, City Council meeting, the Department's Measure T – *New Fire Station Placement Prioritization*<sup>3</sup> recommendations were accepted by the City Council, initiating the construction of three new fire stations and the replacement of two existing fire stations. Thus far, Measure T-completed fire station projects include Fire Station 37 at 2191 Lincoln Avenue, and the landside bay addition at Fire Station 20 constructed in cooperation with San José Mineta International Airport and the Federal Aviation Administration.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://sanjose.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view\\_id=&event\\_id=2139&meta\\_id=576986](https://sanjose.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=&event_id=2139&meta_id=576986)

<sup>3</sup> <https://sanjose.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=7296426&GUID=8097B35E-F3AA-441B-A951-9B6135862F50>

The additional fire stations funded by Measure T, along with ongoing response time performance improvement strategies, have contributed to improved response time performance and resource availability. However, continued increases in emergency call volume continue to challenge Department resources in meeting response time targets.

## **ANALYSIS**

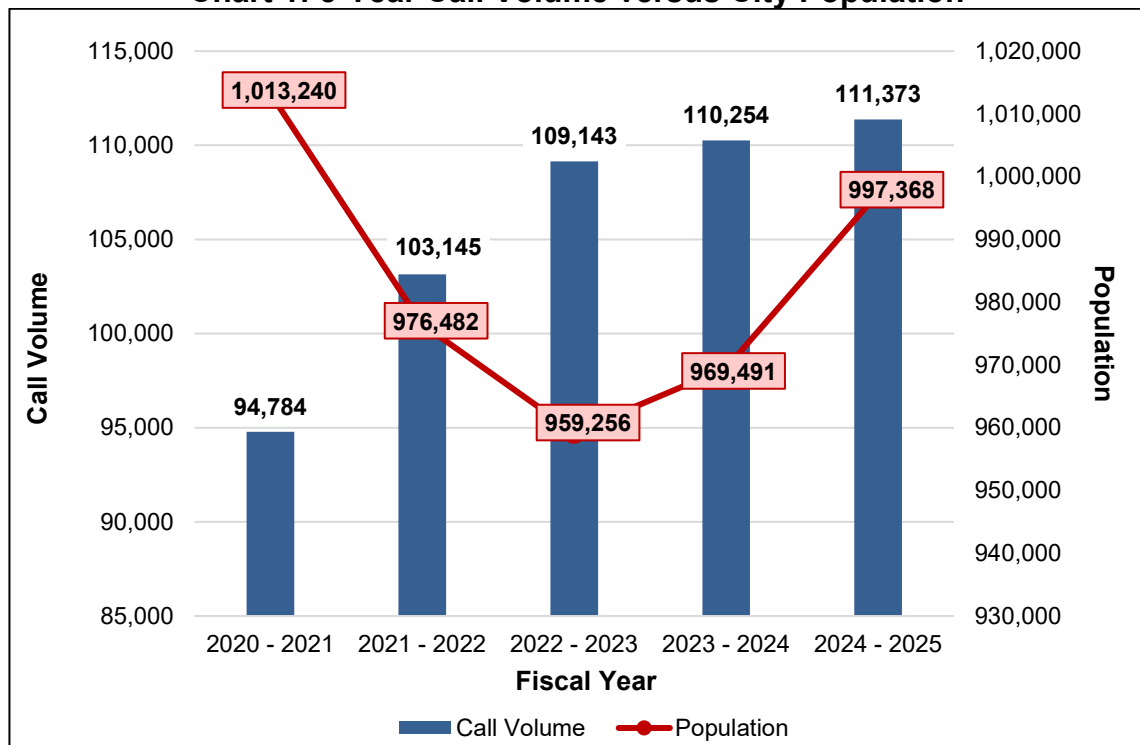
### *Fire Department Emergency Call Volume*

In FY 2019-2020, the Department's call volume was 91,595 compared to 111,373 in FY 2024-2025, resulting in an increase of approximately 21.6% in demand for emergency response. As depicted in Chart 1 below, the City's population decreased by 4.9% in that same five-year period from 1,049,187 in FY 2020-2021 to an estimated 997,368 in FY 2024-2025.

### *Population Impacts*

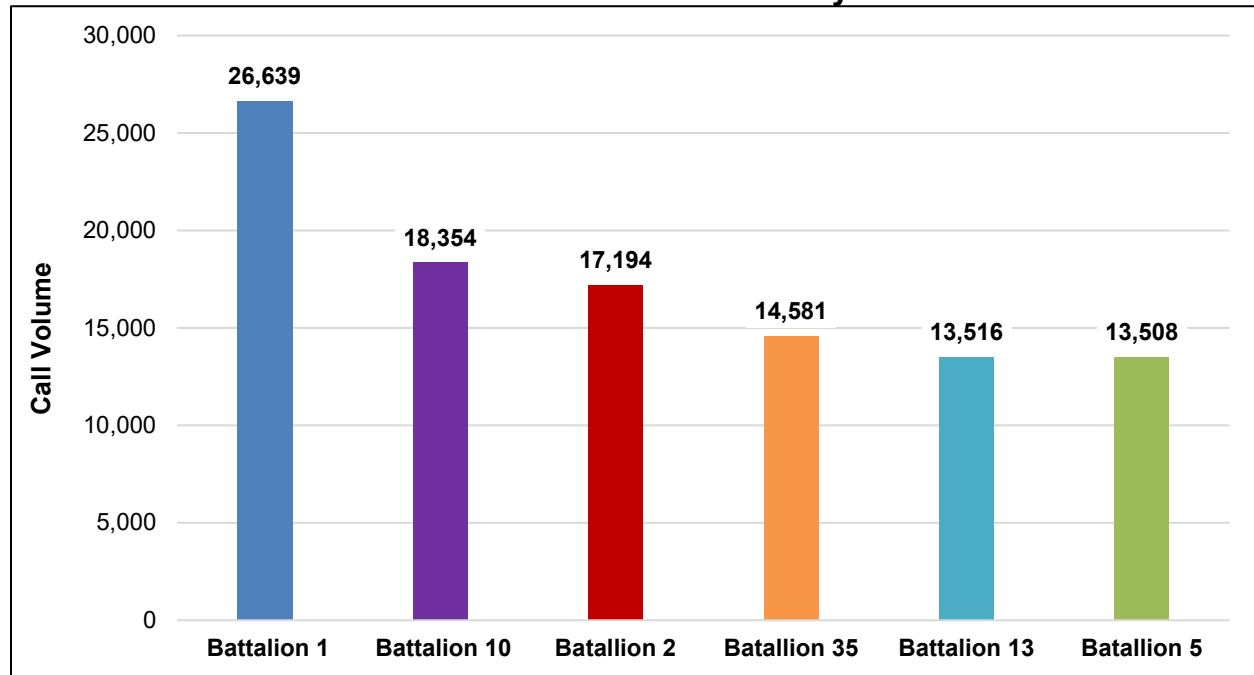
Prior to 2020, there was a consistent correlation between rising population and rising emergency call volume. However, since 2021, call volume has risen significantly despite a drop in population size.

**Chart 1: 5-Year Call Volume versus City Population**



Generally, call volume intensity is greatest in the core of the City and lower at its perimeter. As indicated below in Chart 2, Battalion 1, which is centrally located in San José, had 26,639 incidents in FY 2024-2025. At peak periods, resources from other battalions are drawn into the core of the City as Battalion 1 resources are drawn down.

**Chart 2: FY 2024 - 2025 Call Volume by Battalion<sup>4</sup>**



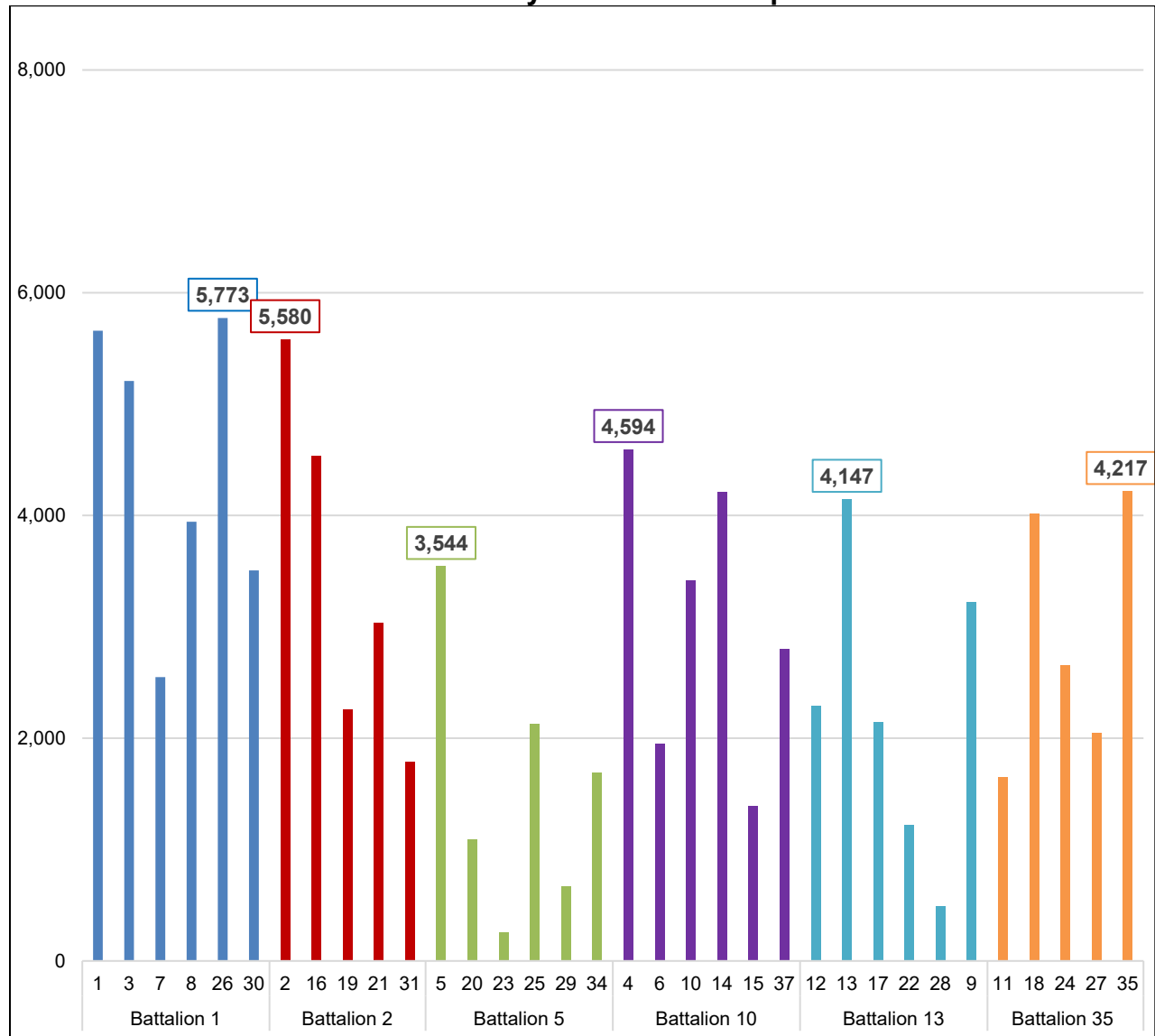
Fire stations are located throughout San José to provide emergency response coverage; however, population density and service demands can vary for each station’s response area. Chart 3, on the following page, identifies the fire stations experiencing the highest call volume in each battalion. It is important to note that call volume numbers reflect single emergency incidents and not the total number of resources deployed or total operational workload. As examples, a request for emergency medical services might require a single advanced life support unit response and a multiple alarm fire would require a multiple unit response.

Again, highest call volume is concentrated in the core of the City. The Fire Station 26 (528 Tully Rd.) response area experiences the highest call volume Citywide with 5,773 incidents in FY 2024-2025. Enabled by Measure T, the addition of Fire Station 37 improved response time performance immediately west of the Fire Station 26 response area and the future additions of Fire Stations 32 and 36 will fortify coverage east of Fire Station 26. It is anticipated that these fire station additions will result in marked improvements in response time performance within their respective response areas and ease response demand across all fire stations.

<sup>4</sup> Miscellaneous category captures calls identified within the Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system for Mutual and Auto Aid calls received by the City of San José not directly associated with a particular Battalion.

The FY 2023-2024 Adopted Operating Budget authorized the addition of three Battalion Chief positions for the deployment of a sixth Battalion, enabling the Department to improve span of control across all battalions to more equitable and manageable levels. This model continues to enhance the reliability of the Department’s operations by reducing travel distances and response times for command staff in the eastern and central areas of San José. Historically, these areas have been more difficult to serve due to limited resources. This approach improves residents’ quality of life, health, and safety, while also supporting community outreach and key department functions such as fire inspections and public education.

**Chart 3: FY 2024-2025 Call Volume by Fire Station Response Area and Battalion**



High call volume centralized in the core of San José negatively impacts the Department’s response time performance because of reduced first-due resource

availability, resulting in extended travel time for resources traveling from more distant fire stations.

As shown in Figure 1, on the following page, the heatmap reflects call volume intensity ranging from lowest (blue) to highest (red). Current fire station response area call volumes result in reduced resource availability and compromise response time performance.

**Figure 1: FY 2024-2025 Call Volume Heat Map**

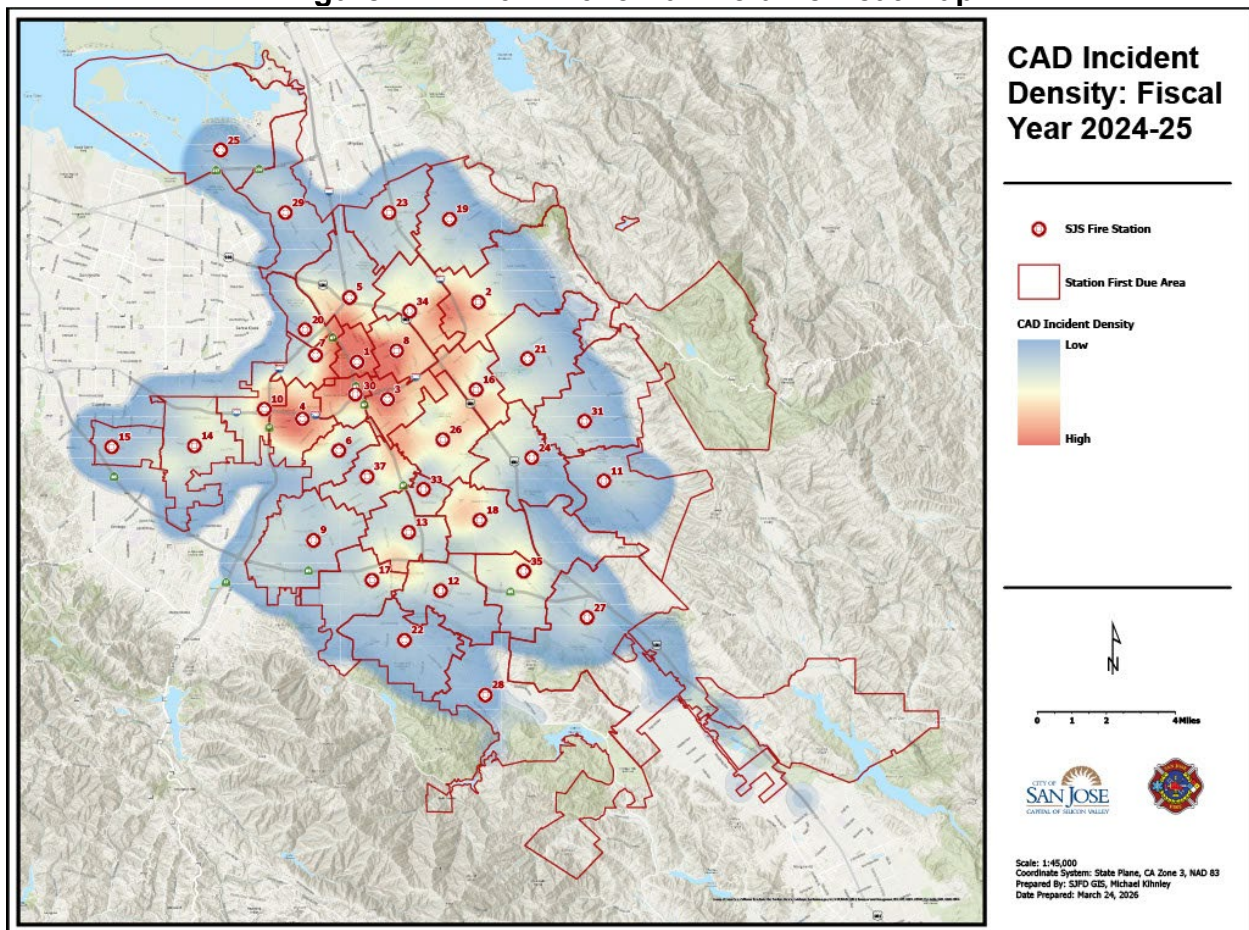


Figure 2 reflects late response responses, defined as (travel times greater than four minutes), ranging from the lowest concentration (blue) to the highest concentration (red). The figure below illustrates how resource drawdowns – defined as periods when units are unavailable due to active incidents or commitments – impact response time performance.

**Figure 2: Late Response Heat Map FY 2024-2025**

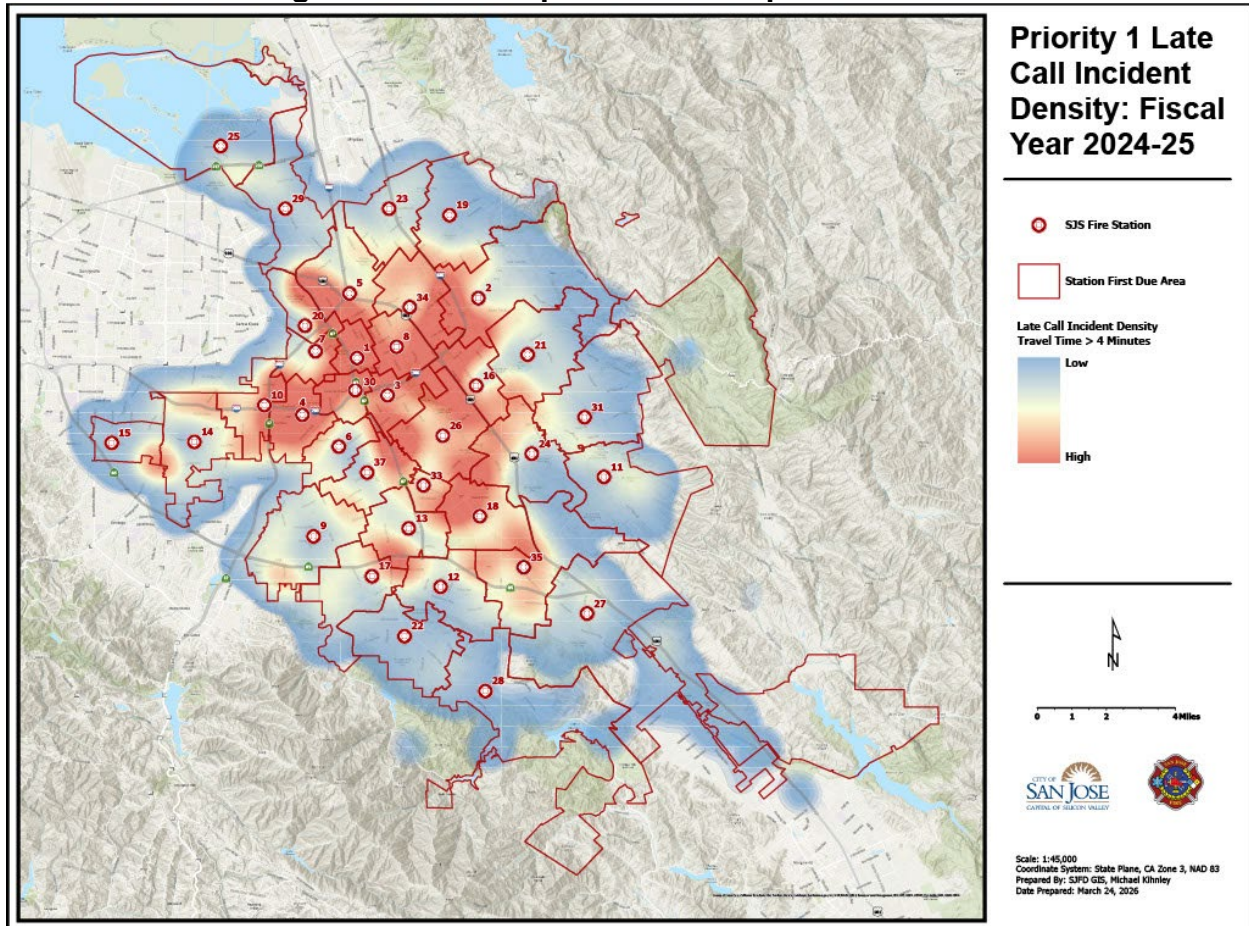
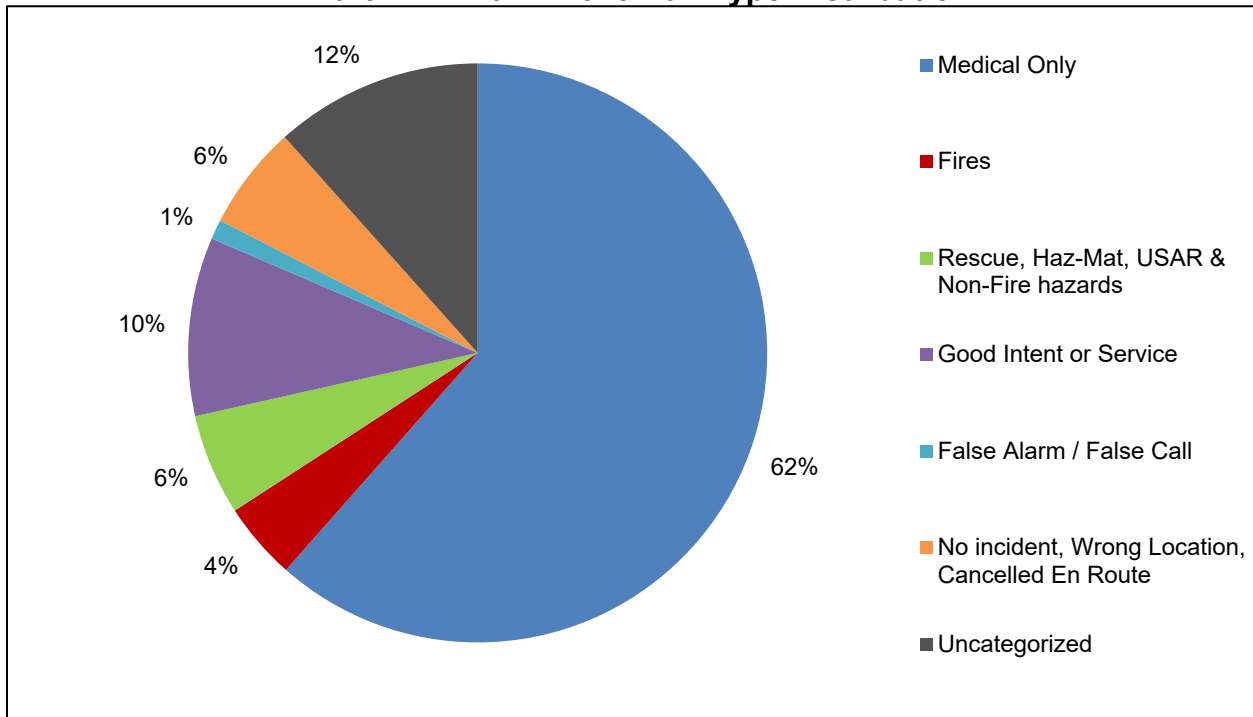


Chart 4 depicted below provides the call type distribution of the 111,373 incidents in FY 2024-2025. Each call type was within 1% to 2% from the prior year's distribution. The Department experienced no significant marked increase in medical call volume percentage, and there was no clearly discernable change in call type distribution.

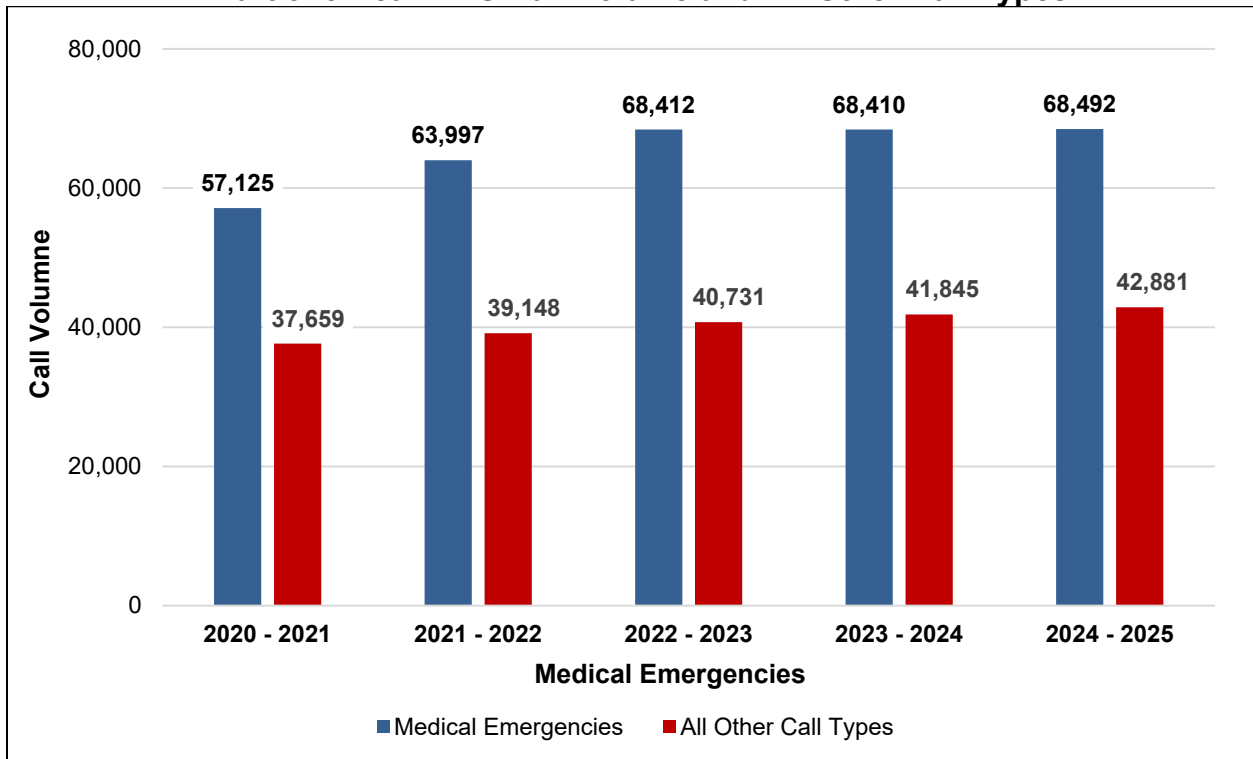
**Chart 4: FY 2024- 2025 Call Type Distribution**



***Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Call Volume***

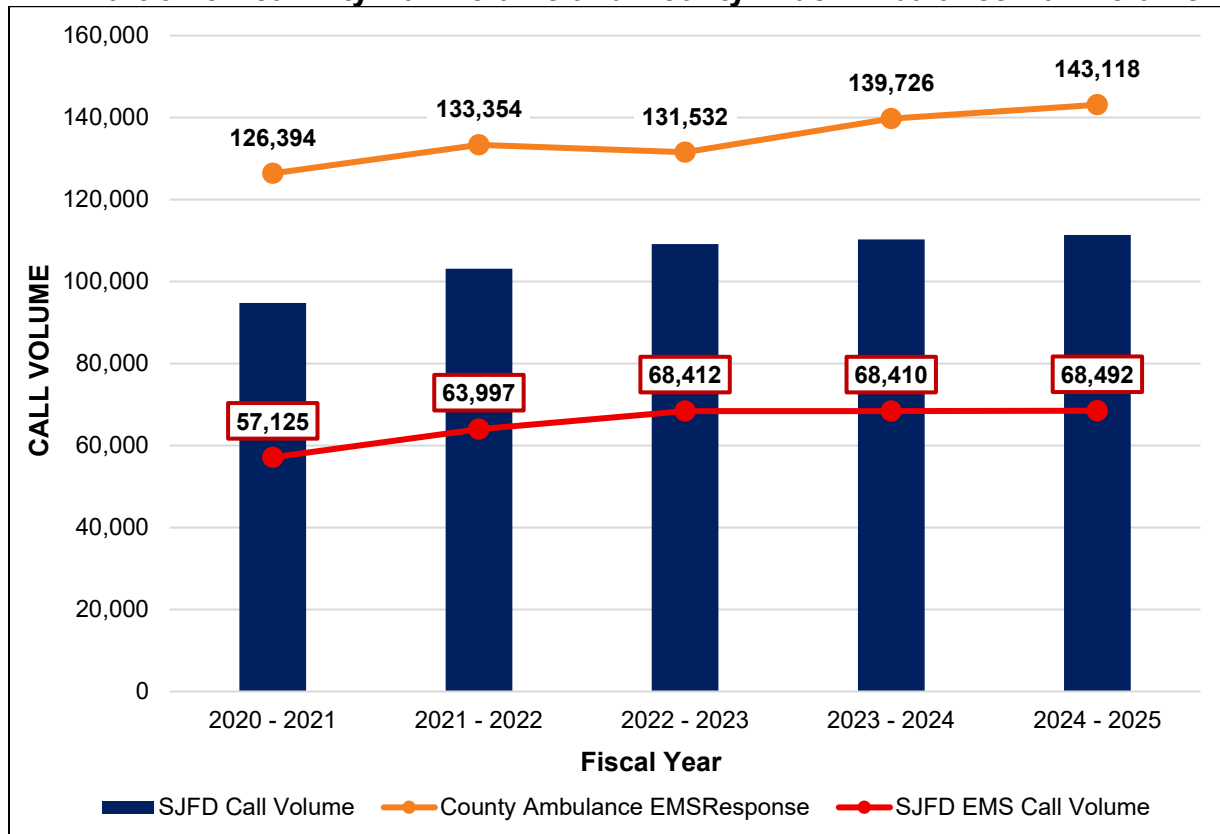
As depicted in Chart 5 below, EMS call volume remained relatively stable between Fiscal Years 2019-2020 and 2020-2021; however, it increased by approximately 12% in Fiscal Year 2021-2022 and an additional 6.7% in Fiscal Year 2022-2023. Since that period of growth, EMS call volume has stabilized at an elevated level, with no material change observed between Fiscal Years 2023-2024 and 2024-2025. Similarly, total responses for all other call types showed no material change between Fiscal Years 2023-2024 and 2024-2025, following an overall increase of more than 19% over the prior five-year period.

**Chart 5: 5-Year EMS Call Volume and All Other Call Types**



Call volumes are increasing county-wide; however, the activity observed in the City's EMS call volume has outpaced Santa Clara County's Emergency Medical Services (County EMS) ambulance responses on a county-wide scale. As shown in Chart 6 below, County EMS 9-1-1 ambulance responses increased by 13.2%, rising from 126,394 calls in FY 2020-2021 to 142,341 calls in 2024. During the same period, total responses for the City grew by 17.5%, from 94,784 to 111,373 calls, while City EMS call volume rose by 19.9%, from 57,124 to 68,492 calls.

**Chart 6: 5-Year City Call Volume and County-wide Ambulance Call Volume**



*Aging Population*

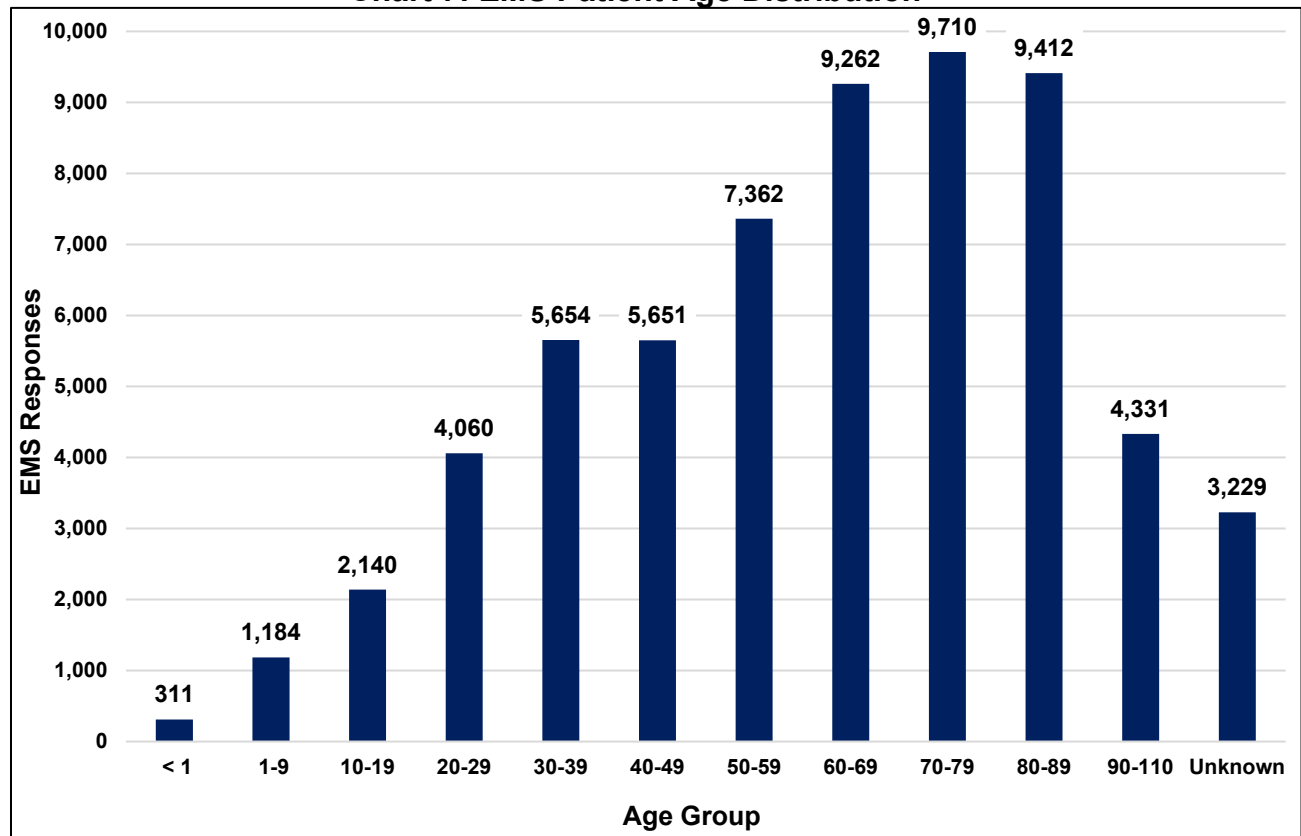
According to the California State Plan on Aging issued in 2021<sup>5</sup>, the number of Santa Clara County residents above the age of 65 years will increase by 99.3%, from 277,700 in 2010 to 553,409 in 2030. Additionally, residents aged 85 years and older are estimated to increase by 84.6%, from 28,039 in 2010 to 51,772 in 2030. The California State Plan on Aging made the following statement regarding health care demands of people aged 85 and over:

*The current size of the population age 85 and over and the projected increase in this age group, is notable. Those who are 85 and older have a significantly higher rate of severe chronic health conditions and functional limitations that result in the need for more health and supportive services. The rapid growth of this age group has many implications for individuals, families, communities, and government.*

<sup>5</sup> <https://aging.ca.gov/download.ashx?IE0rcNUV0zbUy1iwYmWKNg%3d%3d>

In FY 2024-2025 the available patient age data from the Department’s Medical Priority Dispatch System (MPDS) indicated that 58% of patients were age 60 years and over and 70% of patients were age 50 years and over. Chart 7 below provides a distribution of emergency medical responses across various patient age groups for FY 2024-2025.

**Chart 7: EMS Patient Age Distribution**



### *Local Mutual Aid*

Call volume is increasing throughout the county and particularly in areas south of San José, including Morgan Hill and Gilroy. San José has historically provided mutual aid support within the county and beyond. Locally, this is achieved through automatic aid and mutual aid agreements. Automatic aid is designed to dispatch the closest station to areas regardless of jurisdictional boundaries, within specified limits. It is reciprocal and generally has minimal or no impact on participating agencies’ call volume.

Comparatively, in-county mutual aid is provided on an as-needed basis. As call volume increases and response time performance continues to be challenged, mutual aid becomes increasingly challenging to support. In past years, as resources were released to provide mutual aid support for other agencies, other resources would be moved up to provide coverage to the vacated areas. Currently, as resource availability decreases due to higher call volume, it is increasingly challenging to provide backfill resources and

maintain response time performance levels while providing mutual aid support. The Department will continue to monitor these types of impacts and utilize mutual aid during significant incidents throughout San José.

### *Mutual Aid*

The Department continues to actively participate in the California Fire Service and Rescue Emergency Mutual Aid System and supports the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) National Urban Search and Rescue Response System through California Task Force 3.

During FY 2024-2025, the Department supported multiple state and national incidents through both apparatus and overhead deployments. From January through December 2025, the Department deployed resources to a wide range of incidents, including the Palisades Fire, Eaton Fire, multiple wildland fires across California, and out-of-state responses such as flooding incidents and hurricane support.

In total, the Department deployed:

- 10 apparatus (eight Type I engines and two Type III engines)
- 40 personnel assigned to apparatus
- 29 personnel in overhead and Incident Command System roles, including assignments in Operations, Plans, Logistics, and Public Information

Additionally, eight FEMA-affiliated personnel were deployed to national incidents, including flooding events and hurricane response. These deployments reflect the Department's continued operational readiness and its integral role in statewide and national mutual aid systems.

### *Public Education and Safety*

The Department continued to expand its public education and community risk reduction efforts during FY 2024-2025, with a particular emphasis on wildfire preparedness in high-risk areas.

Through a Fire Prevention and Safety Wildfire Risk Reduction Grant, the Department implemented a comprehensive Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) education campaign focused on the East Foothills and Almaden Valley. This effort included targeted outreach, multilingual educational materials, and direct community engagement to promote defensible space, home hardening, and evacuation preparedness.

As part of this initiative, Department personnel conducted large-scale residential risk assessments in identified high-risk areas. These assessments included property-level evaluations, distribution of educational materials, and referrals to Code Enforcement when hazardous conditions were identified. The program was designed to directly engage residents and improve compliance with wildfire safety practices.

In addition to field-based outreach, the Department expanded its public education efforts through updated digital content, community meetings, and coordinated messaging campaigns to improve public awareness and preparedness. Educational materials were made accessible through multiple formats, including QR-coded resources and online content, to ensure broad community reach.

These efforts reflect the Department's continued commitment to proactive risk reduction, community engagement, and strengthening resilience in areas most vulnerable to wildfire.

### *Fire Department Emergency Response Times and Metrics – City and County EMS Response Times*

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

*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 an arrival time within eight minutes, 80 percent of the time for Priority 1 incidents and an arrival time within 13 minutes, 80 percent of the time for Priority 2 incidents. Priority 1 incidents are emergency incidents that are determined to require immediate response with response vehicles using lights and sirens. Priority 2 incidents are 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.

*Santa Clara 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. All 9-1-1 calls are triaged by Public Safety Radio Dispatchers utilizing the 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.

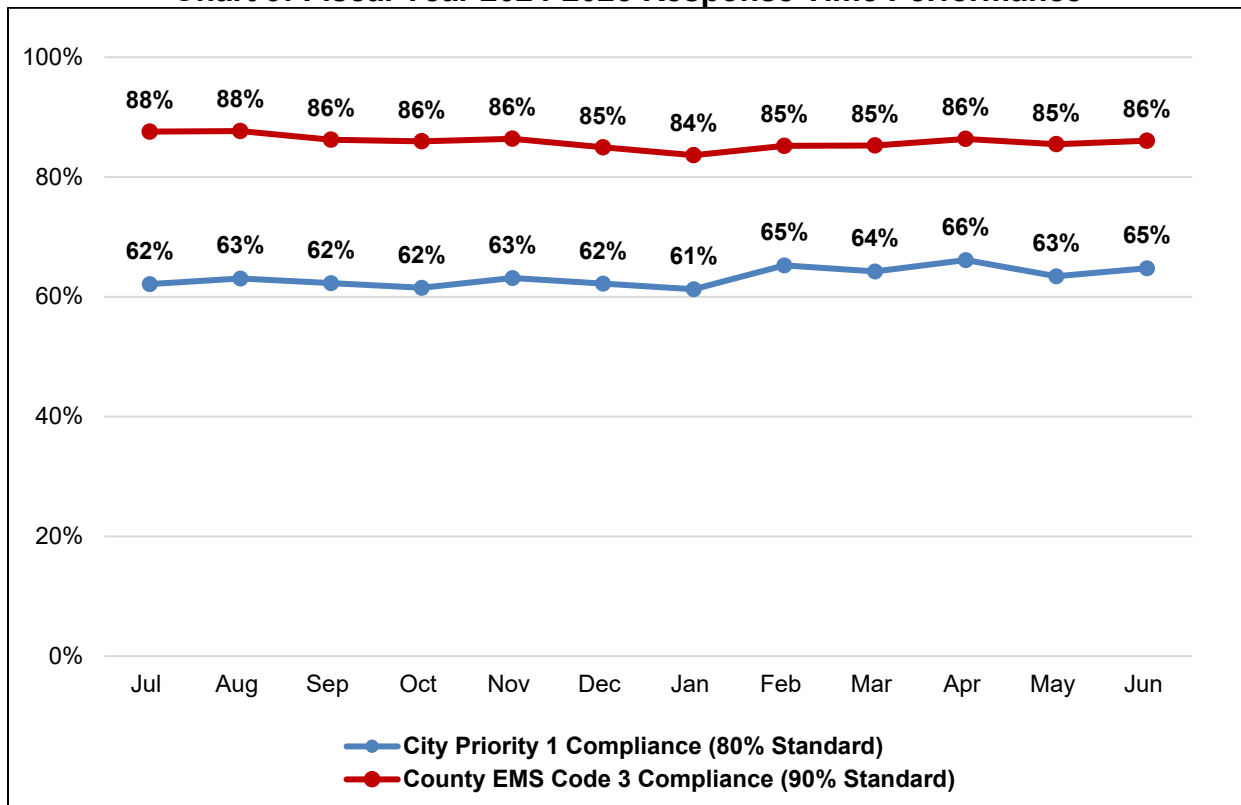
Under the County EMS response time standard, the time clock begins upon dispatch of response resources and stops upon arrival at the incident address. The agreement with the County includes response time performance "exceptions" for responses outside of the County's defined Exclusive Operating Area and 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, resulting in a readjusted compliance rate.

*Response Time (City and County EMS)*

Chart 9 below represents the Department’s monthly response time performance for FY 2024-2025. County EMS response time performance reflected is unadjusted for allowable exceptions.

**Chart 9: Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Response Time Performance**



During FY 2024-2025, the Department's response times averaged:

- *City Standard:* 63 percent, or 17 percentage points below the City Standard of 8 minutes, 80 percent of the time for Priority 1 calls.
- *County Standard:* 86 percent, or 4 percentage points below the County EMS Code 3 Standard of 8 minutes, 90 percent of the time.

### *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 eight minutes, 80% of the time. The eight-minute target includes two minutes for alarm processing, two minutes for turnout, and four minutes for travel time. The Department meets alarm processing and turnout time standards 60% of the time, however, the four-minute travel time target is met less than 25% of the time.

Alarm processing begins when a 9-1-1 call is received by the Department's Fire Communications Division and assigned to a call taker. Most calls are transferred from Public Safety Answering Points including the San José Police Department Communications Center, Santa Clara County Communications, California Highway Patrol, and others.

In FY 2019-2020, the Department achieved four improvements that have had 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 Fire Communications to San José 3-1-1, "off-hook" answering technology, and a new fire station alerting system.

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 the available 9-1-1 dispatcher, eliminating ring time and dispatcher reaction time.

The fire station alerting system utilizes a computerized voice and can reduce alarm processing time by simultaneously dispatching calls. Prior to this improvement implementation, dispatches had to occur in sequence to wait for dispatcher and radio channel availability.

In FY 2021-2022, the Department implemented use of the *RapidDeploy RadiusPlus* platform provided by the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services to integrate 9-1-1 caller cellular location information and external data sources. Text-to-9-1-1 service was also transitioned to the *RapidDeploy* platform in accordance with a California Governor's Office of Emergency Services contract award. These efforts improve efficiency during alarm processing by combining data previously accessed via disparate systems into a single platform.

Turnout time is measured from the time a unit is notified of an incident to the time the unit initiates response (travel). Turnout time entails the following: personnel stopping current activities, walking to the emergency vehicle, using appropriate personal protective equipment based upon call type, mounting apparatus, and securing seat

belts. Response time performance data is shared with companies during each 48-hour work tour, and shift-specific turnout time performance is shared twice per month with field supervisors.

As previously noted, travel time is the Department’s primary challenge to on-time response performance. Distance between fire stations, unit out-of-service time, traffic congestion, and high call volume each contribute to travel time challenges. As an ongoing effort to close the distance between fire stations and to increase resourcing, the City is continuing to advance new fire station building projects enabled by Measure T. In March 2022, the newly relocated Fire Station 20 expanded the Department’s coverage from the San José Mineta International Airport Fire Station 20 by deploying an advanced life support unit to better serve the surrounding residential and business community. Additionally, in May 2022, the Department completed construction and fully operationalized Fire Station 37 to fortify fire protection coverage and improve response time performance. 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 pre-empting 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 2024-2025, the Department responded to 111,373 incidents, which is about a 1% increase in call volume from the reported 110,255 incidents in FY 2023-2024. Over the last five years, the Department experienced about an 18% increase from the 94,784 incidents reported in FY 2020-2021, as indicated in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Annual Incident Volume**

	<b>2020-2021</b>	<b>2021-2022</b>	<b>2022-2023</b>	<b>2023-2024</b>	<b>2024-2025</b>
<b>Total Incidents</b>	94,784	103,145	109,136	110,255	111,373

Increased call volume results in more instances where the first-due response resource is unavailable to respond. Second- and third-due response resources require additional travel time to arrive on 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 result in reduced response time performance.

Figure 3 depicted below indicate responses on a Heat Map where travel time was greater than four minutes. Red areas indicate the greatest number of late responses,

and the green areas indicate the lowest number of late responses. Although fire stations are closer together at the core of the City, the high number of incidents results in an increased number of late responses as previously explained. This data gathered has aided in the placement and prioritization of new fire stations.

Leveraging funding from the Measure T bond will enable the construction of the new Fire Stations 32 and 36, as well as the relocation of Fire Stations 8 and 23. Fire Station 32 is currently under construction built in East San José, near McLaughlin Avenue and Story Road, while Fire Station 36 will be built near McLaughlin Avenue and Capitol Expressway. The relocation site for Fire Station 8 is currently being constructed near East Santa Clara Street and North 13<sup>th</sup> Street. Both relocated fire stations are anticipated to improve the Department's emergency response performance. Measure T also provided funding for the improvement of the 9-1-1 Call Center Upgrade that houses the Police and Fire emergency communications, including the expansion to incorporate the Office of Emergency Management. Improvements to the physical space at the 9-1-1 Call Center 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 anticipates upgrades ready for operational for use in October 2027.

The Department continues to advance multiple system performance improvement strategies toward improved response time performance and overall system sustainability. Table 2 provides initiatives in progress.

**Table 2: Response Time Work Plan**

Item	Comments
<p>CAD-to-CAD Dispatch Link</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Status: In Process</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Timeline: Mid-2026</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Segment: Call Processing and Travel Time</i></p>	<p>In collaboration with Santa Clara County Communications, the Department is nearing implementation of a CAD-to-CAD interface which will enhance information exchange across CAD systems and will result in efficiencies including a substantial reduction in inter-Communications Centers telephone calls, improved unit location awareness, and enhanced emergency backup capabilities.</p>

Item	Comments
<p>Closest Unit Dispatch</p> <p><i>Status: In Progress</i></p> <p><i>Timeline: Mid 2026</i></p> <p><i>Response Time Segment: Travel Time</i></p>	<p>This effort would dispatch resources based upon apparatus proximity to the incident rather than to the station location. The Department completed the installation of CradlePoint network routers on apparatus to support cellular network redundancy, leveraging FirstNet and Verizon to connect with the Hexagon CAD system. The Department is currently working with Hexagon on fine-tuning the accuracy of GPS location that can support the “closest” location.</p>
<p>Community Paramedicine</p> <p><i>Status: In Process</i></p> <p><i>Timeline: TBD</i></p> <p><i>Response Time Segment: Overall</i></p>	<p>The Department is pursuing opportunities to participate in a pilot program to better serve the community by provided community paramedicine resources as an alternative to traditional 9-1-1 prehospital care response. Community paramedics would engage with residents to connect them to the most appropriate care pathways in lieu of transport to hospital emergency rooms.</p>
<p>9-1-1 Telemedicine</p>	<p>The Department will be assessing the feasibility of implementing a 9-1-1 telemedicine alternative to connect patients with non-emergent medical needs with the appropriate medical care.</p>
<p>Fire Station 32</p>	<p>Enabled by Measure T, Fire Station 32 construction is nearing completion and will be serviceable in 2026. The Administration is evaluating the deferral of operations as part of the Proposed Budget development process.</p>
<p>Fire Station 36</p>	<p>Enabled by Measure T, Fire Station 36 is in design phase.</p>

March 27, 2026

**Subject: Fire Department Operations Annual Report**

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### **EVALUATION AND FOLLOW-UP**

The Department will return to the Committee in Spring 2027 with its next Annual Fire Department Operations Report on call volumes and emergency response times performance metrics.

### **COORDINATION**

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert Sapien, Jr.", written in a cursive style.

ROBERT SAPIEN, JR.  
Fire Chief, Fire Department

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