



Memorandum

TO: PUBLIC SAFETY, FINANCE
AND STRATEGIC SUPPORT
COMMITTEE

FROM: Paul Joseph

SUBJECT: City-Generated Tow
Services Delivery Model
Status Report

DATE: September 26, 2025

Approved

Date:

10/6/2025

RECOMMENDATION

Accept the Police Department's status report of the City-Generated Tow Services Program.

BACKGROUND

On January 15, 2019, the City Council accepted the City Auditor's "Audit of Towing Services: Changes to Contract Terms and Consolidated Oversight Could Improve Operations" report along with the Administration's response. The audit recommended improvements, including issuing a new Request for Proposal (RFP) for towing service agreements and transitioning the tow contract administration from the Planning, Building and Code Enforcement Department's Code Enforcement Division to the San José Police Department (Department).

Between 2019 and 2024, staff worked diligently to complete work plan items supporting the recommendations and goals of the audit report. Staff have historically provided status updates on these recommendations through the Transportation and Environment Committee, including the most recent update in April 2025, where staff informed the Committee that the only remaining open Tow Audit recommendation was the consolidation of tow contract administration within the Police Department. As of spring 2025, this final recommendation had been completed, and Committee alignment was transitioned to the Public Safety, Finance and Strategic Support Committee.

On February 3, 2025, the City of San José finalized a contract with Autura, a tow management systems provider, to automate its towing and impounding process. As a third-party contractor, Autura is responsible for managing tow operator contracts with six

current operators, monitoring performance, enhancing service delivery, providing software for real-time tow tracking, and operating a public portal for vehicle location and fee payment.

Autura installed software, known as Aries, to streamline the entire towing process, from initial dispatch to impound management. Once Aries was in place, the Department launched a pilot program in two Central Division police districts (District Robert and District Victor). As part of the pilot, the Department created a new automated tow sheet, known as the City of San José Tow Slip, to replace the paper towing form (CHP 180) used by the Department for the past 30-plus years. The CHP 180 was created by the California Highway Patrol (CHP) and is currently being used by the CHP and other law enforcement agencies throughout the state. The City of San José Tow Slip is specific and exclusive to San José.

Since the pilot launch in February 2025, patrol officers working all shifts in the two aforementioned districts have been using the City of San José Tow Slip for all vehicle tows and impounds. Officers in all other districts will continue to use the CHP 180 until full Departmental implementation, which is expected to be completed by the end of calendar year 2025. Additionally, Community Service Officers and Transportation Department personnel have been using Autura for their tows and impounds citywide.

ANALYSIS

Operational Enhancements

The new tow service model introduced significant operational enhancements, which improved efficiency, communications, customer service, and oversight. The following are some highlights of those enhancements:

- **Program Modifications:** The City replaced the previous three-page CHP 180 tow slip (manually completed by officers and submitted to the Department's Auto Desk at the end of their shift) with a more concise, one-page digital tow slip submitted online. This change streamlined record-keeping and reduced administrative burdens.
- **Ease of Administration:** City staff requesting tows can now track their assigned tow trucks in real-time—like ridesharing apps—via their mobile devices or Mobile Data Computers (in patrol cars). Officers no longer need to chase down tow providers for declined tows; instead, they have a single point of contact for any issues related to towing operations.
- **Billing Improvements:** Automated functionalities have streamlined tracking of financial charges associated with towing services.

Key Implementation Components and Accomplishments

Seven months into the pilot program, the Department has experienced several successes and milestones. The following are two highlights:

- From August 18, 2025 to September 11, 2025, the Department collaborated with the Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services Department's BeautifySJ Program and the Housing Department on the Columbus Park Abatement project. Within a three-week span, 121 vehicles were towed out of the park; a total of 114 vehicles were disposed of, of which 79 were oversized vehicles (Recreational Vehicles (RVs), Motor Homes, Campers, etc.).
- The Department has added another staff member to authorize the disposal of vehicles valued at less than \$500, doubling the Department's capacity for this program. This process is known as the Auto Appraisal Certification and is documented on a Department of Motor Vehicles form. Previously, only one officer position was assigned to this task, which created a significant backlog of unwanted vehicles that required authorization for disposal.

With the aid of the Aries software, the Department has captured tow data since the launch on February 3, 2025. The data pertains only to current Autura users with access to Aries, which includes patrol officers in the two police districts involved in the pilot, Community Service Officers, and Transportation Department personnel citywide. The data does not include tows processed by San José Police Department officers in any part of the city other than the two districts involved in the pilot.

Unfortunately, certain historical data was not fully transferred or was duplicated in the migration process from the old software to the new Aries software during the first four months of the pilot. Therefore, only data collected after May 30, 2025, will be analyzed. Below are the tow data collected by Aries in June, July, and August of 2025:

| | Tow Requests | Released to Owner | RVs Towed for Disposal |
|--------------------------|--------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| June 2025 | 1,222 | 770 | 17 |
| July 2025 | 1,183 | 700 | 17 |
| August 2025 ¹ | 1,465 | 730 | 4 |
| 3 month total | 3,870 | 2,200 | 38 |

¹ This does not include data from the Columbus Park abatement project during August and September 2025, for which data is still being completed.

Challenges

Since the launch of the pilot program, the Department has noted the following operational challenges:

1. System Failures
2. Tow Company Compliance
3. Unforeseen Abatement Projects

System Failures. While the program has been widely adopted, some technical and operational hurdles remain. For example, due to a failure in the software system, on August 11, 2025, officers in District Robert were not able to initiate any tows. However, Autura IT was able to resolve the issue within two hours.

Tow Company Compliance. Some tow operators continue to refuse service for recreational (RVs) or oversized vehicles, which presents an ongoing challenge. Approximately 46 oversized vehicle tows were refused between June and August 2025. Staff is actively working to resolve these issues through system refinements, vendor coordination, and operational adjustments.

Unforeseen Abatement Projects. Although the Columbus Park Abatement Project was unprecedented and was implemented smoothly, the project also increased costs for the towing and disposing of RVs at an estimated cost of \$252,800. The Department Fiscal and Budget Unit is actively working with the City Manager's Budget Office to resolve the issues through a request for additional funding. For this additional funding, an action to increase the Police Department's Non-Personal/Equipment budget by \$600,000 will be included in the 2024-2025 Annual Report, which will be considered for approval by the City Council on October 21, 2025. Other operational adjustments will be made in the upcoming extended contract as part of the second amendment with CFKAA Holdings, LLC (as assigned to by AutoReturn US, LLC) for Services Relating to Tow and Disposal of Recreational Vehicles. These changes were approved at the September 30, 2025, City Council meeting².

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the City-Generated Tow Services Delivery Model has modernized San José's towing operations, enhancing efficiency, accountability, and public service. Moving forward, staff will:

² <https://sanjose.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=7682224&GUID=5E32C6AC-0AA7-4572-B329-838494E4E2E5&Options=&Search=>

- Continuously monitor performance metrics to assess system effectiveness and outcomes, ensuring that the model remains responsive to the City's and community's needs;
- Further optimize service delivery and address outstanding technical challenges in partnership with Autura; and
- Collaborate across departments to overcome operational challenges and refine processes.

These efforts will support ongoing improvements and align with San José's broader goals for public safety and operational excellence.

The Police Department, in coordination with the City Manager's Budget Office, Transportation Department, and Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services, will continue to assess and evaluate the costs, fees, resources, and budget needed to support the City-Generated Tow Services program and will forward any necessary budget recommendations as part of future budget processes.

COORDINATION

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



Paul Joseph
Chief of Police

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