

**A FEASIBILITY STUDY OF PUBLIC FIRE SERVICE  
CONSOLIDATION FOR THE SOUTHWEST COUNCIL OF  
GOVERNMENTS**

**EXECUTIVE PLANNING**

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## ABSTRACT

Due to the steady increase in population and commercial/industrial development in the Southwest region of Cuyahoga County, the fire service needed to consider regional consolidation as the means to achieve the most efficient operations and the greatest cost effectiveness.

The purpose of this paper was to determine the feasibility of consolidating the 18 municipal fire departments belonging to the Cuyahoga County Southwest Council of Governments into one regional department. Among the factors evaluated were the actual financial effects of consolidation, the political ramifications, and the overall benefits to customer service that would be derived from consolidation. I have used descriptive and evaluative research in answering the research questions. Two surveys were sent, one directed to the fire chiefs, and the other to the mayors of the cities in the region. An extensive literature review was performed to explore the various ramifications of consolidation for the cities involved. Interviews were conducted with fire service personnel employed by fire districts that have experienced consolidation.

There were three questions this paper attempted to answer:

1. How will fire chiefs and mayors of the municipalities in the Southwest Council of Governments respond to the concept of consolidation?
2. What will the effects of consolidation be on the provision of services to the communities involved?
3. Will any benefits be derived by the fire department personnel as a result of consolidation?

The results of the literature review indicated that each department or region had different experiences with consolidation efforts due to numerous factors. The interviews that were conducted also pointed out different problems and solutions that might be encountered before, during, and after consolidation. The results of the surveys sent to fire chiefs and mayors generally fell into two areas. The fire chiefs were generally in favor of regional consolidation of operations and planning, while the mayors were by and large ambivalent to the concept.

Based on the information gathered from all sources, the recommendation of this study was to move toward consolidation of fire department resources on a regional basis.

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## INTRODUCTION

The fire service today is facing many of the same problems that challenge private industry. The cost of providing services or manufacturing a product must be kept at a minimum while quality and productivity must increase. Taxpayers are demanding accountability from their city leaders while desiring an increase in the quality of life in their neighborhoods. Each year municipal councils review their annual budgets and negotiate for methods to control their expenditures, or keep any increases at a minimum. The fire service must not only compete with other municipal agencies for its fair share of the budget, but also market itself to the public to fight against private industry takeover.

Nationally, fires have been steadily dropping in number due to the efforts of code enforcement, and, as a result most departments have taken on a new identity. Seventy to eighty percent of the emergency calls received by fire departments are for emergency medical services. Hazardous materials response and mitigation have been added to America's traditional fire service role, along with special rescue needs such as confined space or high angle rescue. Terrorism is the new buzzword, and the fire service is a primary response agency, as is only logical. If the fire service is going to survive the challenges it is facing today, it is possible that a complete renovation of fire department structure is necessary.

The goal of the fire service should be to safely provide the maximum amount of service to the population served at the lowest possible cost. In order to achieve this goal, I have chosen to investigate the possibility of regional

consolidation of the fire service as a means of providing services at minimum cost and optimum efficiency.

To aid in my research I formulated three questions:

1. How will fire chiefs and mayors of the municipalities in the Southwest Council of Governments respond to the concept of consolidation?
2. What will the effects of consolidation be on the provision of services to the communities involved?
3. Will any benefits be derived by the fire department personnel as a result of consolidation?

Utilizing the information garnered from the research, definitive answers to the above questions were obtained.

### **BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE**

This topic relates to the executive planning class in that change is a constant in the fire service. It is unrealistic to believe that economic circumstances of local government, taxpayers wants and needs, delivery of services, and a host of other factors will remain constant for the next five to ten years. Consolidation of fire departments is just one option that will allow the public fire service to meet future challenges. Planning for these changes will play an important role in determining the success of a fire department's future.

The Southwest Council of Governments (SWCG) was formed by eight cities in 1973, with the intent of coordinating public safety services and functions among the member cities. My city, Strongsville, was one of the founding members. None of the member cities had enough incidents to justify the expense of special teams

within one department, with the attendant personnel and equipment costs. The initial thrust was toward drug enforcement activities, bomb disposal, and general law enforcement with the creation of the Southwest Enforcement Bureau (S.W.A.T.). The West Cuyahoga Hazardous Materials Response Team, which covers the southwest part of the county, was created in 1990 under the authority of the S.W.C.G. At the same time ten more cities joined the SWCG. Discussions are underway to develop a technical rescue team using the same format. With an increased possibility of terrorist activities, a regional approach to incident planning and response is even more necessary, due the likelihood of potentially large numbers of exposed and contaminated victims. The eighteen fire departments in the SWGC region have mixed staffing. Eight departments are comprised of career personnel, while nine have combined career and paid per call firefighters. One department is staffed entirely by volunteers.

At present the area covered by the SWCG is around 120 square miles, with a population of approximately 294,000. Among the possible exposures within the proposed district are three interstate highways, eight railroad lines, 2 large regional shopping malls 2 large hospitals, many municipal facilities, both heavy and light industrial occupancies, and commercial and residential areas. The taxpayers of the individual cities, like their counterparts nationwide, are expecting "more bang for their bucks" with maximum services rendered at minimum cost. The regional teams have functioned very well, providing complete response capabilities to member cities in a cost effective manner. In 1995 a Mutual Aid Box Alarm System (M.A.B.A.S) was put in place. This created a systematic

approach to incident responses that require more equipment and/or manpower than an individual city can muster on its own. This year Strongsville is joining a cooperatively owned radio system already in use by several other local jurisdictions. An audio activated emergency vehicle traffic control system, compatible with that of other local departments, is also being installed. Important components of a regionalized system are now in place. Continuing the process will provide expanded response capabilities to all member cities with little, if any, accompanying increase in costs.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

According to Lahaie (1994), in the United States today there are thousands of local jurisdictions providing fire protection services. He goes on to quote from Picard (1975), reporting that '3,000 counties, 18,000 municipalities, and 19,000 townships employ over ten million people, and spend over \$100,000,000 on fire protection services on an annual basis in the United States.' These figures are quite significant, as even judging by the figures from twenty years ago, a very large percentage of government budgets is committed to fire protection and related services.

On the Federal level, Rivlin (June 8, 1995), in an introductory letter for a report to the U.S House of Representatives Sub Committee on Treasury, Postal Service, and General Government, states "The report finds that a consolidated Federal Fire Service is not supportable for various reasons." However, she indicates further down in the letter, "There are, however, a number of creative local and regional solutions that have created efficiencies in Federal fire service,

and agencies will be encouraged to consider others, such as local standardization and consolidation.”

Garrett (1995) refers to David Sanders of the Metropolitan Affairs Coalition in Detroit, suggesting that the issue of today’s taxpayers who are demanding more services for less money helps fuel moves toward consolidation. Garrett (1995, p.2) goes on to quote Police Chief Ralph Soffredine of Traverse City as saying, “Consolidation, particularly in the fire department, is the way to go.” Rice (1996) referring to Ron Delgado, chief of the Half Moon Bay Fire District in California, pointed out that consolidation may offer benefits of economies of scale attributable to an ability to offer greater levels of service without increased expenses. Scott (1995) suggested that there’s a present shared attitude that government is too flabby. Taxpayers desire more services or better services, but they rarely want to increase taxes. Later in the article Scott (1995, p.39) states,

Such economic and political pressures are coming at a time when demand for fire suppression, thanks to better codes, education, and technology - is generally leveling off or falling. While voters still consider fire suppression a key service, they aren’t willing to invest more public funds in it.

Kamrath (1994, p.18) indicated that the taxpayer is concerned with where and how his taxes are being spent and, “is not willing to continue giving his wallet to government to do with as they wish”.

In support of consolidation of fire services, Bruegman (June-July, 1994), who is chief of the Hoffman Estates, Illinois Fire Department, indicates that one of the most effective ways for reducing our expenses while at the same time

enhancing our service levels could be consolidation. The savings would depend upon the particular circumstances of each jurisdiction. He also feels that great savings could be realized nationally, even with a constant or increased level of service to the communities involved in consolidation. Grover (1994) indicated that consolidation might become a primary vehicle for providing enhanced services and cost savings. He also did not feel that this is necessarily true in all areas of the country. He suggested that each municipality or jurisdiction should review its own status. His opinion also is that consolidated systems will improve performance at larger fires and other emergency operations and can result in substantial operational expense savings while improving insurance ratings.

Snook (1991) believes that the consolidation his fire district went through was a positive move. He pointed out that due to consolidation there were efficiencies obtained and money was saved. Jealousies between departments decreased. Department programs were broadened with a regional Level III Hazardous Materials team. In addition, a heavy rescue team was established.

Koos (1997), indicated that fire departments have a variety of different values and many departments are not standardized in their approach to their purpose. However, due to the importance of saving lives and protecting property a common denominator is created in their main occupation. This purpose can be used to help combine two individual fire departments into one consolidated department.

Coffman (1994), in his research dealing with consolidation of fire departments in northern Virginia concluded that many fire departments across

the United States were already participating in consolidation programs.

Information he obtained through interviews also indicated that there was a strong support for consolidation in his area.

According to McGrath (1995), one of the most difficult issues facing the fire service at this time does not consist of any technical aspect of prevention or suppression of fires. The challenge is to provide direction and leadership for a profession whose workload is increasing while its funding resources are becoming more difficult to increase or even maintain. Throughout the country, fire departments are considering the benefits of joint ventures that embrace items ranging from the informal sharing of resources to outright merger or consolidation of entire departments.

Kamrath (1994, p.18) states,

The fire service needs to look at ways to provide greater efficiency for less money. There are many ways to provide this efficiency; however, as pointed out with this research, reducing redundancy, reducing costs, improving services, and lowering insurance premiums, are to name a few examples of benefits of mergers...

Coffman (1994, p.iii), takes a slightly different tack, putting more emphasis on improvement of service than the cost of operation, he states, "The overriding concern of the chiefs, however, was not cost. Maintenance and improvement in the service provided to the residents by the departments together as well as individually was placed as a higher priority."

Rule (1992) suggests that one of the most promising concepts for the fire service, but one that may be intimidating to elected officials and fire service personnel, is the merger of multi-jurisdictions into one department. Rule, in support of this concept, describes an emergency incident during which he witnessed a vehicle from one political entity went right by another entity's fire station. Rule further states in his article from January, 1992 (p. 32):

A consolidated fire service would overcome these political boundary issues, because the closest units would respond to the emergency. If the public has reason to trust that emergency responders will be prompt, well equipped, and competent, it will accept and even demand consolidation.

Alexander (1990, p.23), described how a regional approach to hazardous materials incident response has helped in his area. Speaking about a large scale response in which the regional hazardous material team participated, he says, "The gathering of expertise, the coordination with Miamisburg's emergency plan, and the functioning of the incident command system proved the need for a regional hazardous materials response effort."

Lavoie (1994, p. 42), appears to give qualified support to consolidation, stating,

Because of the control it can exercise, a community should maintain its own fire department if it can afford to do so. If the jurisdiction cannot provide the resources to adequately and efficiently address the fire loading of the community and provide the service on its own, alternatives must be looked at, and consolidation and/or regionalization is a viable alternative.

Simpson (1994, p.42) believes, "There are economies to be realized by combining stations near boundaries in some cases."

Not all authorities felt that consolidation was necessarily a money saving device but still felt that consolidation is beneficial. While he was referring specifically to police organizations, Tully (1998) states, " The consolidation of police forces to create large regional police forces will not be less expensive...."

He further states,

The successful efforts of consolidation in Jacksonville and Las Vegas, ... have produced very effective law enforcement organizations but not necessarily at a cost saving to the taxpayer. There are two reasons why I think consolidation of forces is an idea whose time has come. First the cost of utilization of technology, such as computer services, radio transmission, and laboratory services are very high. Yet new technology has the capacity to serve extremely wide areas and very large numbers of people.

Hoetmer (1994, p.40) also does not believe that consolidation will result in savings to the communities involved, and also does not like the concept of consolidation. He says,

I don't think consolidation or regionalization necessarily reduces public fire protection costs. What it can do is insulate certain practices from the rigors of local review. By regionalizing, one can easily remove the service from closer inspection of citizens and insulate it from pressure to improve or cut the cost of the service.

Delgado, again quoted by Rice (1996, p.1), states, "Consolidations rarely result in reduced spending. However, generally, consolidations are good." Stofer (1994, p.41) also believes that no savings will be realized from consolidation, stating,

I don't feel that consolidation is the answer to cost problems. It doesn't lower the cost and leads to longer response time, and the taxpaying public does not feel that consolidation is the way to go. Just because you make the service big doesn't make it less expensive.

Coffman (p.9) indicates that "... as indicated by the chiefs that were interviewed, budget should not be the sole or overriding concern." He then goes on to say, "It was a shared view across the board among the chiefs that if money could be saved and result in maintaining or, preferably improving service levels, then consolidation should be considered." In an article about regional consolidation in Wales, U.K., Hayton (1994, p.107) indicated that the eight county councils, which are responsible for the fire brigades, gave strong opposition to the proposal.

Johnson (1990) lists some of the positive and negative aspects of the merger of districts as well as operational consolidation of the districts. Some of the improvements listed include: the ability to have a dedicated mechanic's position, higher staffing levels during the day, the ability to spread administrative duties among three officers (more even distribution of work), and more financial control, along with improvements in operations. Some of the negative aspects were: decentralization of influence, visibility of operations, potential labor problems, and the mixing of apparatus and equipment. Thomas (1994)

discusses the various options available to jurisdictions to increase operational efficiency and cut costs. As part of her discussion, she introduces Fire Department Consolidation-Why and How to do It Right (published by Volunteer Firemen's Insurance Services) as a good informational aid that offers guidance for study and implementation of a merger/consolidation.

As an example of increasing efficiency while cutting costs, Chief Berousek of the North Shore, Wisconsin Fire Department (personal interview, July 18, 1998) stated, during his interview that, "one million dollars had been saved over three years" after the consolidation and merger of seven departments into one occurred. Forty-eight pieces of rolling stock (trucks) of various manufacturers had been reduced to thirty-five vehicles of standardized make and design. This permits his department to buy parts in larger lots, makes standardized equipment placement possible, and allows for a generally more efficient operation. He went on to describe the process by which consolidation and merger proceeded successfully.

In a study done by Amin et al. (1989) for the merger of two local fire departments, it was stated that currently a call for assistance is answered by the responsible community's fire department regardless of which community's fire station is closest to the call. It was stated that under consolidation the location of each fire station would remain the same. Response to emergency calls would be determined by the proximity of a fire station to the incident, thus providing a more rapid response time and enhance the life safety service for each community.

The study goes on to say:

Through interviews, it was determined that the fire chiefs of both the Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township stations intuitively believe that the consolidation of personnel and equipment would decrease response time to fire calls and other emergencies. This is significant in that an improvement in response time is considered by the fire department to reflect an improvement in community safety. The fire chiefs also believe that a merger of the two facilities could promote cost efficiencies by eliminating the need for duplicate equipment.

Firefighter Fiorica of the American River Fire District, California (e-mail interview, August 15, 1998), believes that, "the biggest reason for the consolidations/mergers has been the cost savings. These savings were due to reduction of upper management personnel. They are also due to more efficient operations." He goes on to say "response times have decreased in some areas, but not necessarily due to consolidation." His county has a joint central dispatch center and utilizes boundary drops. "Boundary drops supposedly allow the closest resource to be dispatched in an emergency call no matter whose jurisdiction the emergency is actually in."

There may also be conflicts between what the elected officials see as cost and operational efficiencies and what is perceived by the fire service. Gary Briese, executive director of the International Association of Fire Chiefs, as quoted by Garrett, comments on this potential disparity, stating, "Politicians and chiefs are the biggest adversaries."

The literature review pointed out the many pros and cons of consolidation. There was sufficient data available to warrant further study of the concept of consolidation of public fire services for the Southwest region of Cuyahoga County.

## **PROCEDURES**

The Learning Research Center at the National Fire Academy was used for the initial information search on the issue of consolidation. A large body of information is available on this topic, both in periodicals and in previously submitted Executive Fire Officer Program papers. Numerous fire service magazines were reviewed for articles. In addition, a search of related topics was conducted using the Internet, with some articles being found and used.

The National Fire Protection Association was contacted to determine if any information was available. Cuyahoga County Public Library resources lacked any significant information on fire department consolidation, but did offer access to information on the merger and consolidation of commercial entities.

A telephone interview was conducted with Chief Dave Berousek of the North Shore, Wisconsin Fire Department, which has experienced a recent merger and consolidation. An interview was conducted with Firefighter Larry Fiorica of the American River Fire District in California by e-mail following my request for consolidation information on the Fire-EMS Net Internet bulletin board.

A survey was sent to the chiefs of all eighteen fire departments and also the eighteen mayors/city managers in the Southwest Council of Governments. The survey used (see Appendix A) was adapted from one created by Tim

McGrath (1995) for a doctoral dissertation submitted at Walden University. The fire chiefs survey was differentiated from the one for the mayors by using one letter on the last page of the survey, otherwise the surveys were identical.

Applicability of the survey results to other jurisdictions may be limited, due to the small size of the sample and the fact that the survey was restricted to departments and city officials in the affected region.

## **RESULTS**

How will the chiefs and mayors of the municipalities in the Southwest Council of Governments respond to the concept of consolidation?

The results of the surveys (see appendix B) sent to the fire chiefs and mayors of Southwest Council of Governments member cities are listed below. All of the surveys sent to the region's eighteen fire chiefs were completed and returned, as were seventeen of the eighteen mayor surveys sent. Of eighteen fire chiefs that responded to the survey, 16 gave indications of support for a consolidation of their departments into one regional department. There was a strong feeling on the part of the chiefs that consolidation/merger should foster response of the closest unit, regardless of jurisdiction, rather than a more distant unit of the responsible jurisdiction. In addition, there was a strong indication that the chiefs felt master planning for fire protection would be easier should regional consolidation occur. There were some differences in the chiefs' opinions as to what the effect would be on response time and efficiency should a consolidation occur.

The response from the mayors was not quite as clear cut. Many of the mayors indicated concerns about the loss of control of their fire response that their cities might experience in the event of a consolidation. There was an acknowledgement on the part of both survey groups that the public might have a negative view of consolidation from the perspective of local control. The mayors showed varying degrees of support for consolidation, ranging from completely opposed to apparent enthusiasm for the concept. They were evenly split as to whether a consolidation would actually be cost effective. The mayors responded to one of the questions, which involved a single dispatch entity, in the positive. They felt that a central dispatch agency would be advantageous.

What will the effects of consolidation be on the provision of services to the communities?

The majority of the chiefs believed that there would be expanded opportunities to expand services in their communities and that it would be more cost effective to consolidate. The mayors anticipated improved services following a consolidation. The literature review indicated that the majority of authors were of the opinion that consolidation would increase the depth of services and resources available to the cities in a consolidated fire district. At the same time, they felt that these services could be provided with a cost savings or, at a minimum, with no increase in cost.

Will any benefits be derived by the fire department personnel as a result of consolidation?

The majority of fire chiefs felt that the morale of their respective organizations would benefit from a consolidation effort. Most mayors felt that morale on their departments would be adversely affected. In the literature review there was a perception on the part of some sources that opportunities for career advancement would increase. These sources also felt that department training would be improved due to standardization, and that firefighter safety would be enhanced by improved coordination of scene accountability.

### **DISCUSSION**

Through the course of my career as a firemedic, a fire marshal, and as a fire chief, I have seen my city, and the cities surrounding it, grow, both in residential population and in commercial/industrial development. With this expansion has come all of the problems associated with larger residential populations, more commercial and industrial development, higher risk factors for hazardous materials releases, and thus the need for an expanded fire department. In addition, I have seen mergers of large corporations in the private sector that enhanced their operational efficiency and cost effectiveness. Not all merger/consolidations are successful in their results, however, so individual circumstances need to be carefully considered before a final decision is made. This is especially true in the area of the fire service, as there are public safety issues to consider in addition to the financial ramifications.

Fire departments today are under great pressure to provide more services to the community while maintaining fiscal responsibility. At a time when fires in this area are becoming less frequent, departments need to justify their existences by

increasing the range of services that they provide to the community. This increase in services cannot be associated with a gross increase in budget, as taxpayers would object strenuously.

To meet the need for expanded community services while not inflating their budgets, many cities have initiated the provision of more services, but have not had a corresponding increase in staffing levels or equipment. These cities have taken on responsibility for emergency medical services, hazardous materials response, technical rescue response, community first aid and C.P.R. classes, safety classes for local commercial and industrial sites, and others.

The fire service has expanded beyond its traditional role of fire suppression by increasing the number of services provided, but this has generated a higher workload for departments. America Burning informed the nation's fire service of the importance of being proactive as opposed to the traditional reactive response. Company fire inspection became a priority for progressive fire departments. Preplans changed from pencil drawings to computer aided drawings. The Strongsville Fire & Emergency Services Department has downloaded blueprints for a sophisticated hospital project, via the Internet from the architect's firm, to be included in our preplan resource manual.

National Fire Protection Association Standard 1500 (NFPA, 1992) was created and changed the way the fire service must operate at fire scenes. It established the standard for two personnel fully equipped and available to act as a rapid intervention team for personnel inside a burning structure or other

incident. Standard 1500, Section 6.52 very specifically states "A rapid intervention team shall consist of at least two members and shall be available for rescue of a member or a team if the need arises."

Federal mandates increased the staffing level requirements for fire departments across the country when OSHA implemented the 2 in, 2 out rule. Smaller fire departments historically have extinguished structural fires during the incipient stages, possibly with three firefighters on the scene, whereas four personnel are now required to make entry. This puts an additional financial burden on the small departments that may not have a large enough budget to hire more personnel, thus generating the need for mutual aid from other departments.

An improved accountability system for personnel at the fire scene became a necessity after the tragic losses of fellow firefighters across the country due to building collapse or other hazards. Multi agency personnel accountability can be difficult to establish and maintain during what can be a very active and hectic incident. A regional consolidation would ease that problem as a single system would be put in place for all personnel on the scene.

New technology is becoming available, but the initial investment for purchase of equipment can be prohibitive for a department with limited financial resources. A good case in point is a thermal imaging camera, which can increase operational effectiveness and personnel safety at a fire scene. The cost for one unit can be \$25,000. With a consolidated fire district, not every department would need to purchase a unit. Instead, several units could be

strategically located throughout the district. Another alternative would be to purchase a thermal imaging unit for each jurisdiction, with a possible discount in price due to volume purchasing. Either alternative provides cost savings as a result of consolidation.

In order to provide all of these extra services to the citizens and businesses of their communities, some cities may be spreading their manpower too thin to provide adequate protection to their cities. Mutual aid calls are very common in this area, as there is a large disparity in the size of fire districts and shift staffing among the cities in southwestern Cuyahoga County. If a department with a shift strength of four has an ambulance and two firefighters committed on an e.m.s. run, and then receives a second call, mutual aid must be called for from another city. Similarly, should a large fire or haz mat incident occur, a small fire department probably would not have sufficient resources to cope with the situation without calling in other departments.

Another issue to be dealt with is justification of equipment purchases. With the general decline in fires locally, it is difficult to explain to the taxpayers why the fire department has to purchase a new \$500,000 fire truck. This is especially apparent if one considers the purchase of a ladder truck in a city that has three or four high rise buildings and a very good safety record for those buildings. Of course, Insurance Services Office, Inc. (ISO) ratings must be taken into account and credit is given for possession of a ladder truck without regard for the number of times it might be used. ISO requires that every protected area must have a ladder or service company response, and if any protected area is

beyond 2-½ miles of an existing ladder/service company, then additional ladder/service companies may be needed. Whether a ladder or service company is needed depends on the type of area protected. Response areas with five or more buildings three stories or thirty-five feet or more in height, or with five buildings that have a Needed Fire Flow exceeding 3,500 g.p.m., or any combination of the two, should have a ladder company. All buildings, including those with sprinklers, are considered when the assessment of building heights is performed. In my community (Strongsville, Ohio) ISO requires that two ladder companies be in service to qualify for maximum credit in the Schedule; one fully equipped reserve ladder truck is also required. One problem, which arises with ISO, is that, in the state of Ohio, for anything above a class 7 rating, residential insurance premiums are not reduced for homeowners. Obviously, there is little incentive for the residential taxpayer except the hope that a lower ISO Rating will help attract commercial and industrial development, and thus create more income tax revenue for the city government. The fire chief must consider whether a real impact will be made by additional expenditures for equipment.

The literature review and the chiefs' survey essentially supported the concept of consolidation of fire departments. I perceive that for my area it would be more efficient and cost effective if a regional fire district were formed, allowing all departments within the district access to all of the available resources as necessary. It seems apparent that the public would be better served if the manpower and equipment could be drawn from a larger base. At the same time there could be a decrease in the duplication of equipment purchases, eg. two

ladder trucks could cover two or three cities that have a history of low fire incidence, and still maintain an adequate response time to keep an excellent ISO rating in place.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

On the basis of my literature review and the survey that was conducted, my recommendation is that consolidation of the fire departments of all cities in the Southwest Council of Governments be vigorously pursued. Further research and investigation of consolidation implementation should be conducted in three phases. The first phase will be the appointment of a committee of fire officials from the affected cities to determine the needs of their departments and the effects consolidation would have on them. A report would be generated by the committee and used as a basis for the second phase. With persistence and continued research, enough positive information may be gathered to persuade the mayors to modify their attitudes towards consolidation and strengthen their support for the creation of a regional fire district.

The second phase of research would be the appointment of a committee consisting of fire officials, elected officials, and stakeholders from the community. This committee would evaluate the first committee's report and determine the feasibility of taking action towards consolidation. If the second committee's report is favorable to consolidation a strategic planning and implementation committee would be appointed to assist in the transformational change and formation of a consolidated district.

The Strategic Management of Change class recommends that a change management model be implemented when dealing with a transformation. The selection of an appropriate change management model would increase the possibility of success with this endeavor.

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## APPENDIX A

Fire Department Consolidation Survey

## FIRE DEPARTMENT CONSOLIDATION SURVEY

1. Consolidation of the fire services in our region (Southwest Council of Governments) would afford opportunities to expand services in my community.

Strongly Disagree = 1 2 3 4 5 = Strongly Agree

2. I believe it would be cost effective to consolidate the fire services in our region.

Strongly Disagree = 1 2 3 4 5 = Strongly Agree

3. I could maintain the same community support if a region-wide fire service consolidation occurred.

Strongly Disagree = 1 2 3 4 5 = Strongly Agree

4. Advantages to my organization and my community would outweigh the disadvantages if a region-wide fire service consolidation occurred.

Strongly Disagree = 1 2 3 4 5 = Strongly Agree

5. Consolidation would resolve illogical or problematic response boundaries.

Strongly Disagree = 1 2 3 4 5 = Strongly Agree

6. My community would receive improved services if a region-wide fire service consolidation occurred.

Strongly Disagree = 1 2 3 4 5 = Strongly Agree

7. I feel less government is better.

Strongly Disagree = 1 2 3 4 5 = Strongly Agree

8. A region-wide fire service consolidation would allow for greater employee career opportunities for the employees in my organization.

Strongly Disagree = 1 2 3 4 5 = Strongly Agree

9. My community would receive a better Insurance Services Office rating (fire rate) if a region-wide fire service consolidation occurred.

Strongly Disagree = 1 2 3 4 5 = Strongly Agree

10. Apparatus response times to areas of my protection district will improve if a region-wide fire service consolidation occurs.

Strongly Disagree = 1 2 3 4 5 = Strongly Agree

11. Fewer fire stations will be needed if a region-wide fire service consolidation occurred.

Strongly Disagree = 1 2 3 4 5 = Strongly Agree

12. Fire service response districts should be drawn under the premise of "closest unit response" philosophy versus political boundaries.

Strongly Disagree = 1 2 3 4 5 = Strongly Agree

13. There is a need for a single fire service dispatch facility in our region.

Strongly Disagree = 1 2 3 4 5 = Strongly Agree

14. My feelings about the degree of governmental control have a significant influence on my attitude towards consolidation.

Strongly Disagree = 1 2 3 4 5 = Strongly Agree

15. The overall training of fire service personnel would be improved with a region-wide fire service consolidation.

Strongly Disagree = 1 2 3 4 5 = Strongly Agree

16. There would be a cost savings through volume purchasing if a region-wide fire service consolidation occurred.

Strongly Disagree = 1 2 3 4 5 = Strongly Agree

17. Taxpayers of our region would recognize an increase in protection service level for their dollars if a county-wide consolidation occurred.

Strongly Disagree = 1 2 3 4 5 = Strongly Agree

18. The issue of local power would be a deterrent to a region-wide fire service consolidation.

Strongly Disagree = 1 2 3 4 5 = Strongly Agree

19. There will be an increased effort to consolidate the fire services in the Southwest region within the next ten years.

Strongly Disagree = 1 2 3 4 5 = Strongly Agree

20. I would support a region-wide fire service consolidation in Cuyahoga County.

Strongly Disagree = 1 2 3 4 5 = Strongly Agree

21. Region-wide consolidation of the fire services is an effective way of eliminating a layer of government control.

Strongly Disagree = 1 2 3 4 5 = Strongly Agree

22. The morale of my organization would benefit from a region-wide consolidation effort.

Strongly Disagree = 1 2 3 4 5 = Strongly Agree

23. Standardization of emergency fire services is important to me.

Strongly Disagree = 1 2 3 4 5 = Strongly Agree

24. Jobs would be lost if a consolidation attempt was successful.

Strongly Disagree = 1 2 3 4 5 = Strongly Agree

25. Fire service protection master planning would be easier if a region-wide fire service consolidation occurred.

Strongly Disagree = 1 2 3 4 5 = Strongly Agree

26. The need for specialized apparatus like aerial trucks would be reduced if a region-wide fire service consolidation occurred.

Strongly Disagree = 1 2 3 4 5 = Strongly Agree

27. I would rather my community enter into additional interlocal governmental cooperation agreements with neighboring departments than consider a county-wide consolidation.

Strongly Disagree = 1 2 3 4 5 = Strongly Agree

28. I feel emergency fire service services would be more efficient with fewer layers of government.

Strongly Disagree = 1 2 3 4 5 = Strongly Agree

## APPENDIX B

### Survey Results

Question #	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree	
	1	2	3	4	5
1	0	2	3	7	6
2	0	0	3	9	6
3	0	6	3	7	2
4	0	3	1	6	8
5	0	0	3	6	9
6	0	2	5	5	6
7	0	0	6	6	6
8	1	2	1	8	6
9	0	3	4	6	5
10	2	0	4	5	7
11	2	3	6	2	5
12	0	0	2	7	9
13	0	1	0	8	9
14	1	2	10	2	3
15	0	2	2	7	7
16	0	0	4	7	7
17	2	4	4	3	5
18	0	0	4	9	5
19	0	0	3	10	5
20	0	2	2	7	7
21	0	1	2	9	6
22	1	3	3	10	1
23	0	0	4	7	7
24	2	3	3	6	4
25	0	1	2	8	7
26	0	0	2	7	9
27	1	1	5	4	7
28	0	2	2	7	7
Total	12	43	93	185	171

Figure 1-Results of Fire Chief Survey

Question #	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree	
	1	2	3	4	5
1	0	3	6	4	4
2	0	2	4	6	5
3	1	7	2	6	1
4	0	3	6	4	4
5	2	4	4	3	4
6	2	4	2	6	3
7	0	3	6	6	2
8	2	2	6	5	2
9	4	4	6	3	0
10	3	6	2	3	3
11	2	6	2	5	2
12	0	2	2	7	6
13	3	3	1	5	5
14	1	4	5	2	5
15	2	2	4	6	3
16	2	2	1	7	5
17	4	2	2	6	2
18	2	0	2	6	7
19	0	3	6	5	3
20	2	4	3	6	2
21	2	2	5	6	2
22	5	5	5	2	0
23	2	0	5	5	5
24	4	5	3	5	0
25	2	1	4	7	3
26	2	3	4	2	6
27	0	3	4	4	6
28	3	1	7	4	2
Total	52	86	109	136	92

Figure 2-Results of Mayor Survey