

Whatcom County Emergency Medical Services
800 E. Chestnut St. Suite 3C
Bellingham, WA 98225



To: Satpal Sidhu, County Executive

From: Mike Hilley, Whatcom County EMS Manager

July 22, 2024

Subject: 2024 to 2029 Interlocal Agreement for First Response Emergency Medical Services

City of Bellingham Fire Department
City of Lynden Fire Department
Whatcom Fire Protection District 1
Whatcom Fire Protection District 4
Whatcom County Fire Protection District 7
Whatcom Fire Protection District 8
Whatcom Fire Protection District 11
Whatcom Fire Protection District 14
Whatcom Fire Protection District 16
Whatcom Fire Protection District 17
Whatcom Fire Protection District 18
Whatcom Fire Protection District 19
Whatcom Fire Protection District 21 (dba North Whatcom Fire and Rescue)
South Whatcom Fire Authority

Background and Purpose

The county-wide Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Levy passed in November 2022 and provides funding for EMS services in Whatcom County. The Levy Plan adopted by Council in 2022, included commitments to support Basic Life Support (BLS) Operations. The proposed interlocal codifies these commitments and provides a funding mechanism for the Annual BLS Allocation.

Annual BLS Allocation. County EMS will provide a BLS Cost Allocation at a minimum of \$1.5 million per year to support BLS operations, administration, and transportation to offset local jurisdictions' BLS costs. The distribution of these funds among the 15 participating jurisdictions is based on the previous year's call volumes. The funds are provided on a reimbursement basis for eligible EMS expenses.

EMS Dispatch. County EMS will use EMS levy revenue to cover the cost of all of the EMS calls transmitted from the Dispatch Center. The Dispatch Center directly invoices the County directly for these services (per What-COMM interlocal – Whatcom County Contract 202307025). The annual impact to the EMS fund is estimated approximately \$2.4 million per year and will increase due to inflation over the duration of the six-year agreement.

Fire Dispatch. County will continue to use County General Fund revenue to cover the cost of the Fire dispatch calls transmitted from the Dispatch Center, except for the cities of Lynden and Bellingham (per What-COMM interlocal – Whatcom County Contract 202307025).

Electronic Patient Records System. County EMS will continue to pay for Centralized Electronic Patient Care Records System Fees for all participating agencies through a separate contract with the provider (per contract with Image Trend – Whatcom County Contract No. 201802004-3).

Over the six-year duration of the interlocal, the BLS allocation (\$9 million), dispatch fees (\$14.4 million), and electronic records sharing system (\$1.635 million) are projected to have a \$25 million impact on the EMS Fund. For context, the 2024 EMS revenue budget is approximately \$22 million.

It should be noted that, in the Levy Plan, Whatcom County expressed interest in moving away from funding fire dispatch using General Fund and having all dispatch fees invoiced directly to the Fire Districts/Departments from What-COMM. Currently fire dispatch fees charged to the General Fund amount to approximately \$300,000 annually. This proposed agreement continues current practices and postpones resolution of this issue for six years unless the Districts agree to a contract amendment. We will continue to explore a better method or funding source for these dispatch fees.

Service	Estimated annual cost	6-year cost	Adjustments	Agreement
Dispatch Fees	\$2.4M	\$14.4M	CPI-W Inflation Annually	What-COMM interlocal / proposed fire district interlocal
EPCR System	\$272,500	\$1.635M	5% Inflation Annually	Image Trend contract / proposed fire district interlocal
BLS Allocation	\$1.5M	\$9.0M	No Inflation Annually	Proposed fire district interlocal

Funding Source: Whatcom County EMS Levy

Submitted by Mike Hilley, Whatcom County EMS Manager; mhilley@co.whatcom.wa.us 360-927-1155