

Summary of Themes and Issues from Initial Conversations and surveys of SNOCOM and SNOPAC Board Members

On June 24, 2016, the Joint Task Force unanimously recommended this document be forwarded for review by the SNOCOM and SNOPAC Boards. It was shared with the Boards at their July meetings.

Dated: June 22, 2016

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This document summarizes the main themes, and the main points of agreement and disagreement gathered from surveys completed by Board Members of SNOCOM and SNOPAC (including two phone conversations), and phone conversations with all voting members of the Joint Task Force (Board members/alternates of SNOCOM and SNOPAC). A list of respondents whose feedback was received and incorporated in this summary is provided at Attachment A. Not all primary Board members responded to the survey request. Several Board Alternates did respond. Not all respondents answered all questions, and many respondents had multiple responses to questions.

In summary, there is a shared sense of the importance of the question of consolidation. There are some important shared values around the delivery of public safety communications services, and similar views of some of the potential benefits of consolidating the two agencies. At the same time, there are important distinctions in between the views of board members at the different agencies. Resolving questions around governance of a consolidated agency and addressing the concerns of smaller cities is identified by most as an important challenge to be addressed.

An ideal outcome?

A majority of SNOCOM Board members responding are uncommitted as to what their ideal outcome is, noting that their decision is dependent on receiving and considering additional information hopefully to be developed. A minority of SNOCOM respondents identify consolidation as their ideal outcome; only one member identified not consolidating as ideal.

A strong majority SNOPAC Board members see consolidation as the ideal outcome, although some are not prepared to identify an ideal outcome without first reviewing additional information.

Reasons to consolidate most commonly identified:

Members of both Board shared a number of views on this question. Overall, SNOPAC Board members identified more reasons to consolidate than did SNOCOM Board members.

- The most frequently mentioned reason to consolidate, as identified by both groups, was the ability to eliminate call transfers.
- The second most frequently mentioned reason by both groups was in the area of eliminating duplication/achieving economies of scale/increasing efficiency/securing cost savings.
- Improving public service/safety was the third most important area noted (eliminating call transfers is arguably a subset of this issue).
- Several SNOPAC Board members also identified the ability to develop countywide service and policy consistency—systemic improvements—as an important reason to consolidate.

Reasons identified for not supporting consolidation:

Nearly all of the SNOCOM respondents noted that the potential loss of local control in a consolidated agency is something that could be a reason to oppose consolidation, a view not shared by many SNOAC respondents.

SNOAC members did not identify many reasons to not support consolidation—the most frequently mentioned items was a loss of redundancy (mentioned by a minority of SNOAC respondents)

Barriers and important issues that must be addressed:

The challenge/barrier most frequently mentioned by both groups was the ability to reach an agreement on governance. Many specific concerns were offered within the scope of this subject. The most frequently mentioned issue by both groups was a disagreement about whether elected officials or operational leaders (fire and police chiefs) should serve on the board of a consolidated agency. There were also several comments from both sides about whether the concerns of smaller cities on governance and control could be met.

A majority of SNOCOM respondents also raised issues about costs and cost control.

Data gaps to be addressed:

The SNOCOM respondents offered a wide variety of data gaps that must be addressed, although there was no consensus on which items were most important. There were very few data gaps identified by SNOAC respondents.

Table 1: Data Gaps identified by SNOCOM respondents
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is the cost of consolidation -- in start-up and then 10-20 years out? How will we reach agreement on the assumptions used to make these cost projections?• How will consolidation impact governance, economics of operation, service levels, redundancy and mutual aid?• Is there an optimal size for a communications center?• What have been the outcomes in other consolidations?• Can the call transfer issue be resolved without consolidating? Or are there other reasons having two separate agencies will always be problematic?• How many call transfers are there now, and what is the impact of call transfers?• What operational issues are resolved by merging?• What issues are created by merging?• Do benefits outweigh the costs?• What other options are there?• Is a partial consolidation an option?• What services will be provided?• How will 911 revenue be allocated?

While a few of these questions are ultimately value judgments, the work plan that the Joint Task Force proposes is designed to inform all these questions.

Shared Values:

The survey did not include a direct question on values. Assessing the responses, however, the most frequently mentioned shared values across both groups appear to be:

- Providing good service, efficiently and affordably, to the public and public safety officers
- Ensuring a fair and equitable representation/voice for member agencies in the delivery of these services

Other values expressed include:

- Making data driven decisions
- Being a nimble organization—ability to respond quickly
- Collaboration
- Promoting strong working relationships countywide amongst public agencies
- Open and honest communication
- Unified public safety communications policies countywide
- A public agency that can attract and retain high quality staff
- Ongoing quality improvement—always looking for ways to improve what we do.
- Local control
- Respect for different opinions
- Transparency / accessible to citizens
- Accountability
- Responsive to member agency concerns

Sample comments:

Comments from 3 respondents at each agency are set out in Attachment A.

Conclusions:

In summary, there is a shared sense of the importance of the question of consolidation. There are some important shared values around the delivery of public safety communications services, and similar views of some of the potential benefits of consolidating the two agencies. At the same time, there are some important distinctions in between the views of board members at the different agencies. SNOPAC Board members responding are generally in favor of consolidation, while most SNOCOM Board members responding say they are not yet decided on whether to favor or oppose consolidation. SNOCOM Board members more frequently expressed concerns about costs and cost control than did SNOPAC Board members, who in turn focused more on a variety of benefits that they perceive to be possible from consolidation. Resolving questions around governance of a consolidated agency and addressing the concerns of smaller cities is identified by a majority of the respondents as an important challenge to be addressed.

Attachment A

Respondents whose feedback was received/incorporated into this summary

<p>SNOCOM: Bob Colinas Brad Reading Bryan Stanifer George Hurst Chris Alexander Scott Hugill Jennifer Gregerson Greg Elwin Kent Saltonstall Charles Macklin David Chan Pam Pruitt Ian Cotton</p>	<p>SNOPAC: Rachelle Heinzen Sheriff Trenary Susan Neely Murray Gordon Tim Quenzer Mark Murphy Jon Ventura John Flood Dan Templeman / Jim Lever (joint response) Roy Waugh Rick Smith Steve Guptill</p>
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Sample Comments

<p><i>Sample comments from SNOCOM respondents:</i></p> <p><i>“It’s very difficult to have an honest, independent and fact based analysis when the operational people already have their minds made up and others are not engaged.”</i></p> <p><i>“Even though I’m “operational” and certain politicians claim I have no concern about the cost, this is a fallacy. My city only has so much money. If we are spending it on dispatch services, it isn’t available for me and my colleagues at the police department for local services. I’m all about keeping the costs reasonable, especially over the long term as the public safety needs in the county grow.”</i></p> <p><i>“We need to have an honest discussion among SNOCOM members to come to some kind of direction....some of us must be willing to compromise.”</i></p>	<p><i>Sample comments from SNOPAC respondents:</i></p> <p><i>“There are a lot of politics and personal agendas involved that are bogging down the process.”</i></p> <p><i>“My hope is there will be a consistent method of quality emergency dispatch across all of Snohomish County, that the service will be provided in an affordable financial fashion that is representative of the quality service, and that the singular organization can be seen as an example for other communities across this state as a leader in collaborative service delivery with community service as the guiding principle.”</i></p> <p><i>“I...believe these issues can be overcome by an in-depth study of all the available information as well as the variety of stakeholders being willing to listen and compromise.”</i></p>
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