

LAW ENFORCEMENT ASSISTANCE ADMINISTRATION (LEAA)  
POLICE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE REPORT

SUBJECT An Exploration of Communications  
Needs of the Sheriff's Department  
of Williamson County, Texas

REPORT NUMBER 75-091-022

FOR Williamson County Sheriff's Department

County Population: 46,000 (est.)  
Police Strength (sworn): 9  
Total: 12  
Square Mile Area: 1,126

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CONTRACT NUMBER J-LEAA-002-76

DATE March 2, 1976

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Williamson County is a fast growing county located north of and contiguous to Austin, Texas. The 1960 federal census showed a total population of 35,044; 1970 saw the total climb to 37,305; and, current estimates of the Capital Area Planning Council place the county's population near 46,000.

The county is split by Interstate Highway 35, roughly two-thirds of the county is located to the east of I-35 and one-third to the west. Population growth is occurring in the western one-third, particularly in that portion just north of Austin. The eastern portion is agricultural and not quickly accessible by major highways from the Austin area. The western portion, on the other hand, principally was ranch land and thus suitable more quickly to subdividing. Most population growth has occurred in this portion and likely will continue to do so in the next decade.

This accelerated growth has prompted county officials to question whether the Sheriff's Department is organized and equipped to meet the service problems of an expanding population. This study is an outgrowth of that concern, focusing principally upon one aspect of the Sheriff's Department, its communications needs.

The following is a list of persons contacted in the course of this study:

August H. Bosshard  
Sheriff, Williamson County

Jim Boutwell, President  
Boutwell Aviation & Electronics

Judge C. L. Chance  
County Judge, Williamson County

James Dodson  
City Manager, Taylor

Robert L. Eason  
Trooper, Texas Department of Public Safety

Ken Langston  
Chief of Police, Round Rock

Vera Lindholm  
Deputy Sheriff, Williamson County

Loretta Pickett  
Chief Dispatcher, Georgetown

Travis Thomas  
Chief of Police, Georgetown

A. D. Schier  
Chief of Police, Taylor

Daniel J. Walker  
Chief Deputy Sheriff, Williamson County

Leo Wood  
City Manager, Georgetown

#### SURVEY METHOD

All local information which serves as the basis of this report was gathered by the consultant through on-site conversations with the individuals identified above on December 17, 18 and 19, 1975. Interviews were confidential and no individual is quoted or otherwise identified in this report.

The report itself is in two parts -- an overview of the police agencies found in Williamson County, with emphasis upon communications services, particularly the Sheriff's Department; and, a recommendation for improving police communication services within the county, again with emphasis upon the Sheriff's Department. Additionally, some observations will be offered regarding manpower utilization and needs

within the Sheriff's Department.

#### SURVEY PURPOSE

Williamson County, through the County Judge, requested that an appraisal be made of police communications services utilized by the Sheriff's Department and that recommendations be submitted for their improvement. As an integral aspect of that analysis, police communications services available generally within the county were examined. Financial support for their brief survey was made available by the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, U. S. Department of Justice.

#### POLICE SERVICES

Five police agencies provide full-time police protection to residents of Williamson County, the Sheriff's Department and the Police Departments of Cedar Park, Georgetown, Taylor and Round Rock. Several part-time police departments also are found in some of the smaller cities and, as well, there are six elected constables who provide some police and other services to specific areas. A brief commentary follows on four of the five full-time departments.

#### Sheriff's Department

The Sheriff's Department provides traditional services including court bailiff serving civil papers and some police work and custody duties. Staff of the Sheriff's Department consists of the Sheriff, the chief deputy, seven deputies (including one vacancy) and two civilian jailers. One deputy, although sworn, serves as the departmental secretary and is engaged in a variety of clerical and some dispatching duties. Six radio equipped vehicles, as well as six portable units, are available to the Sheriff's personnel.

Dispatching service for the Sheriff's Department is accomplished through two means. During normal business hours on week days, the Sheriff's Department provides its own communications service. During evenings, weekends and holidays, however, all such services are received through the Georgetown Police Department. Occasionally, Sheriff's personnel will handle their own calls in early evening hours, but even on these occasions, Georgetown operates the service after 10:00 p.m. The county pays the salary of one Georgetown dispatcher as a fee for the services received. This arrangement has been satisfactory to both the city and the county.

The communications center for the Sheriff's Department is located in the main office reception area of the agency. There are two smaller offices, one for the Sheriff and the other for other on-duty personnel. During normal business hours, the chief deputy, a deputy and the Sheriff are usually on duty. The on-duty deputy works in the office and does not engage in regular police duties. Indeed, duties performed are of a clerical, not a policing, nature. When court is in session the Sheriff's office is quite busy as individuals come to pay fines. The workload during these periods is quite heavy and it is difficult, if not impossible, for someone to monitor the communications facilities and account as well for the steady flow of visitors, particularly as payments must be received and properly acknowledged. When visitors are in the office, the ability to maintain the radios diminishes as the practice is to turn down the volume in order that conversations may be had with office visitors. Consequently, it is not uncommon for the Sheriff's Department to miss messages directed to it by neighboring police or Sheriff's Departments during these periods. The Georgetown dispatcher, who maintains twenty-four hour coverage, usually notifies the Sheriff's Office by telephone and informs them of any missed message. This, of course, results in delays, delays which could have

serious implications in the event of emergencies.

Approximately 25 police or other vehicles are served through the frequency assigned to the Sheriff's Department, 155.860 MHz, which also has repeater capabilities. Those using this frequency include the cities of Round Rock, Georgetown, Florence and Granger. The Sheriff's Department, as well as two state game wardens, a unit of the Alcoholic Beverage Commission, several constables, and some security officers assigned to construction or industrial sites. Additionally, most of these same jurisdictions have access to 155.37 MHz which is the inter-city communications link between police agencies in the ten-county Capital area.

#### Georgetown Police Department

The county seat, Georgetown, has a 1975 estimated population of 8,000 (6,700 in 1970) and is located near the geographical center of the county. It is served by a seven-man police department, one chief and six police officers. Additionally, two part-time sworn officers are available for special tasks. Southwestern University, located in Georgetown, has two officers which receive dispatching service from the city and work in close cooperation with the Georgetown department. Georgetown has as well a civilian staff of four dispatchers to operate the communication service and provide some clerical assistance to the police department and the municipal court. The city has three radio-equipped police vehicles that use 154.860 MHz as its broadcast frequency.

#### Round Rock Police Department

Located adjacent to I-35 and just over the southern boundary of Williamson County is Round Rock, a location which places this city in the direct path of the population transfer north out of Austin. In 1970, Round Rock's population total was about 2,000.

Estimates for 1975 place the total at about 6,000 and projections for the next decade suggest 20,000 people eventually may reside in Round Rock. The police department consists of four sworn officers, one Chief and three police officers. Four civilian dispatchers operate the department's communications facilities. Three radio-equipped vehicles are available for departmental use. This department, too, broadcasts off 154.860 MHz.

#### Taylor Police Department

Taylor, the largest city in Williamson County, has a population of 9,600 and is located mid-way between I-35 and the eastern edge of the county. No significant population growth is anticipated in this area of the county. Taylor has the largest police staff -- eleven sworn officers (one chief, two sergeants, eight officers) and four civilian dispatchers. The department has four police vehicles, all radio-equipped. Taylor has its own police frequency, 155.250 MHz (no repeater) and provides, without cost, dispatching services to two small communities (Hugo and Granger).

One weakness of the communications systems within the county is that Taylor, located in the eastern portion of the county along State Highway 78, has no direct communication link with Round Rock located to the south and west of Taylor on the other end of Highway 78. Any direct communications between base stations is limited to telephones.

#### GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Communications services of the Sheriff's Department exhibit several weaknesses.

These are:

- (a) no security or privacy;
- (b) high noise levels due to office design in reception and dispatching;

- (c) no access to departmental records when Georgetown operates system;
- (d) no traffic log detailing time and related data for messages received and sent; and
- (e) calls from other agencies go unanswered.

In addition to the problems noted with the communications services there is a separate but related problem -- the inability of the Sheriff to provide effective patrol service in the western portion of the county. Sheriff's personnel work in the office in early evening hours to handle dispatching service and have access to departmental records, even though Georgetown normally is expected to handle dispatching duties during these early evening hours. As a consequence, a request-for-service in the area north of Cedar Park may have as much as a one-half hour response time because no one is on active patrol -- too slow to provide any but haphazard assistance in most situations. As most population growth is occurring in this general area, the need for patrol service on an immediate call basis is becoming more evident, particularly as much of this development is outside any incorporated areas. Any realignment of personnel due to modifications in communications service should result in making more personnel available for patrol duties.

## II. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended here that a full-time dispatching service be established by the Sheriff's Department to serve its own needs as well as to provide certain communication related services to all the police agencies in Williamson County.

A communications center should be established within the County Courthouse in

a location near, but physically separate, from the administrative offices of the Sheriff. Five civilian dispatchers would be necessary to provide full-time services and to operate the system, although four could manage if occasional long shifts were worked to cover vacations, illness and the like.

It is recommended that sworn personnel do not operate the communications system except on an emergency basis. All deputies should be used for actual police duties and all clerical tasks should be turned over to full-time clerical personnel. Deputies should not be used to accept fine payments, maintain accounting records and the like. Indeed, if possible, steps should be taken to encourage a modification in the constable system in Williamson County. Two alternatives seem evident. Either the constables should be incorporated into the Sheriff's Department on a full-time basis or their duties should be restricted to serving warrants and civil process. If the latter alternative were followed, Sheriff's personnel would be free to concentrate on police problems.

It is further recommended that steps be taken through proper channels to re-assign police emergency frequencies. It is suggested that Georgetown and the Sheriff's Department retain 155.860 MHz, that Taylor retain 155.250 MHz, but that Round Rock be shifted to 155.085 MHz together with Cedar Park. All departments should have the capability to utilize 155.37 MHz, the inter-city frequency. A configuration of this type would mean that the county would have an "east-side" frequency, a "west-side" frequency and a "center" frequency with the latter having repeater capabilities giving it county-wide range. This is why the Sheriff's Department should retain 155.860 MHz for its personal use.

As an important element of its communications center, the Sheriff's Department should acquire teletype equipment capable of linking its department to records and other

resources held by the Texas Department of Public Safety and NCIC (National Crime Information Center). No police department within Williamson County now has access to such facilities. It is recommended that the Sheriff provide access to this service through its facilities as the county-wide policing agency. The need for teletype equipment, while evident now, will become more acute as the county's population continues to grow in the next decade.

**END**