



**Public Safety Commission Recommendation no. 20191202-004**

Date: December 2, 2019

**Subject: Recommendation that Council Order Delay Adoption of the Proposed Auto Aid Interlocal Agreement**

Whereas, National safety standards and Line of Duty Death (LODD) after- action analyses stipulate that firefighters should operate using Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) on the fire ground and the current proposed auto aid agreement allows for two SOPs with the goal of working toward a single SOP in the near future, and

Whereas, the proposed Auto Aid Agreement, which adds Williamson County to the existing Travis County auto aid response, cannot functionally go into effect until extensive work on the dispatching hardware and software that will allow the Travis County and Williamson County dispatch systems to work together is completed and tested, and

Whereas, it is projected that these dispatch modifications will not be completed until, at earliest, August 2020, and

Whereas, the citizens of Austin are covered by the current Travis County Auto Aid Agreement which has been in effect since 2013 and will renew automatically and annually until January 2023, and

Whereas, longstanding State Mutual Aid Agreements are in place that currently allow for emergency response agencies to request and receive resources from other emergency response jurisdictions, when necessary, and

Whereas, there is no urgency to approve the proposed Auto Aid Agreement until technical dispatching hardware and software issues are developed and tested, and

Whereas, there is an urgent need to the Austin residents in Williamson County whom deserve immediate relief from the severe emergency response time deficiencies they experience in parts of their area, which some form of auto aid would likely help to remedy, and

Whereas, the proposed Auto Aid Agreement will have ZERO effect toward helping the Austin residents in Williamson County ameliorate severe emergency response time deficiencies until at least August of 2020 (and perhaps much longer), and

Whereas, Austin Fire Department (AFD) contributes the majority of the firefighters and firefighting resources to the current Auto Aid Agreement with Travis County ESDs and will continue to provide a majority of the resources after Williamson County is added to the auto aid agreement, and

Whereas, as the largest provider of Auto Aid resources, under the current Auto Aid Agreement, the Austin Fire Department is frequently required to send multiple emergency response assets outside the City of Austin, essentially vacating Austin neighborhood fire stations, and

Whereas, although over 10 years of data exists, as it regards the citizens of Austin, the Austin Fire Department has not presented the positive and negative impacts of operating under the current or proposed Auto Aid Agreement to the Public Safety Commission nor have these impacts been discussed in open session with City Council or any other Board or Commission, and

Whereas, the City Manager has directed an expensive and extensive third party Emergency Service Dispatch Equity Optimization study to be conducted and completed by mid-2020 which may inform the Council on changes to the Fire and EMS departments, and

Whereas, it has been cited by members of City Council that other decisions to AFD services and programs should be delayed until the completion of the third party Emergency Service Dispatch Equity Optimization study (i.e. the AFD Command Tech program), and

Whereas, no internal and external equity and optimization study has been conducted to determine if the tradeoffs present in the current or proposed Auto Aid Agreement are a net positive to the tax paying citizens of Austin, and

Whereas, if the *currently* proposed Bi-County Auto Aid Agreement is adopted by Council and goes into effect, Austin City Council will have effectively relinquished their authority to the ESD Fire Chiefs to make important changes to the agreement that may be informed by the future internal and third party equity/optimization studies, and Council will lose their authority to protect the safety of Austin Firefighters unless Council embarks on the undesirable path of pulling Austin out of the Auto Aid Agreement altogether, and

Whereas, given that there is no urgency to implement a new Auto Aid Agreement, there may be possible disadvantages to bringing on-board a Bi-County Auto Aid Agreement now and potential advantages to waiting until the technical work is completed to the Travis and Williamson County dispatching systems; until one common SOP is developed; and until internal and third party equity/optimization tradeoff studies have been completed that could inform the construct of future Auto Aid Agreements.

**Therefore, the Public Safety Commission recommends the Austin City Council direct the City Manager to do the following:**

1. Continue to operate under and enforce the current Auto Aid Agreement with Travis County until a new auto aid agreement which includes Williamson County is in effect.
2. In order to provide immediate relief to the Austin Citizens of Williamson County, report back to Council within 30 days on immediate technologies and agreements that can be made quickly to reduce emergency response time deficiencies to Austin residents in Williamson County
3. Return to Council as soon as practical a proposed Bi-County Auto Aid Agreement after the following is achieved:
  - a. Internal equity and optimization studies are completed that will reveal the positive and negative tradeoffs to the citizens of Austin of the longstanding Auto Aid Agreement, and
  - b. Include Auto Aid into the third party Emergency Dispatch Equity and Optimization study to determine if the tradeoffs presented from the past auto aid agreement(s) are a net positive or net negative to the tax paying citizens of Austin and then seek to optimize these tradeoffs in future auto aid agreements, and
  - c. Demonstrate how findings from both the internal and third party study inform the construct of the newly proposed Auto Aid Agreement, and
  - d. Present to the Public Safety Commission the findings of the Internal and third party equity and optimization studies, and
  - e. Place a provision in the Auto Aid Agreement that states that the full Bi-County Auto Aid Agreement will only take effect after the extensive work on the dispatching hardware and software is completed and tested, and
  - f. Ensure there is a single standard operating system for all of the responding Fire Departments that are parties to the newly proposed Auto Aid Agreement, and
  - g. Present to the Public Safety Commission the proposed Auto Aid Agreement, once completed.

4. Direct the appropriate City of Austin departments to continue to work toward the completion of the extensive work on the dispatching hardware and software that will allow the Travis County and Williamson County dispatch systems to effectively and safely work together.

**Vote**

For: 8

Against: 0

Abstain: 0

Absent: 3 (Commissioners Rebecca Gonzales, Ed Scruggs, and Preston Tyree)

Attest: *[Staff or board member can sign]*

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Janet Jackson, Board Liaison,  
Austin Police Department