**REVISED INCIDENT MANAGEMENT CONCEPT**

**FOR THE CITY OF HOUSTON AND HARRIS COUNTY**

**PHASE 1 - SYSTEM SURVEILLANCE**

The presence of law enforcement at Houston TranStar will allow for cost-effective monitoring of longer stretches of multiple freeways from one location, as opposed to having multiple units spread out on the system. It will allow for initial incident assessment and dispatch of services, such as tows/Fire/EMS, to be conducted from this location. It will also allow for remote approvals for non-consent tows, facilitating quick clearance without having to wait for an officer to arrive and restoring mobility to the system faster.

The following recommendations are proposed for enhanced freeway system surveillance for incident management:

* Harris County Sheriff’s Office will have positions on the TranStar Floor to monitor the freeway system within the County via CCTV cameras, speed and travel-time detection, and other methods of notification. Initial incident detection and verification can occur from the floor, and HCSO will coordinate with appropriate responding entities (Fire/EMS/HAZMAT/etc) to address the incident. Staffing should allow for 24/7 surveillance and support for TIM activities.
* TxDOT will continue to provide staffing at TranStar to operate CCTV, DMS, and travel-time/speed collection equipment. TxDOT also provides additional freeway monitoring of traffic activity and incidents, answers incident-related calls, assists the Motorist Assistance Program, inputs incident data into the Regional Incident Management System (RIMS), and operates dynamic message signs on the freeway.
* TranStar houses METRO Police Communications operations, which include camera surveillance of the HOV/HOT system, police dispatch, and incident management activities. These operations will continue as-is.
* Upon implementation of the Quick Clearance Towing Component, HCSO officers on the TranStar Floor will be responsible for remote authorization of qualifying tows, including those within the City of Houston.

The following are the estimated TranStar surveillance costs for the Harris County Sheriff’s Office. Funding will be covered by H-GAC through an existing funding agreement with TxDOT through July 2016. An additional set of funds is available through H-GAC to continue this component through 2018:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **ESTIMATED SURVEILLANCE COSTS** | | | |
| **Surveillance** | **Personnel** | **Per Person Salary** | **Total** |
| Dispatchers | 12 total - 4 per shift | $ 65,000 | $ 780,000 |
| Deputies | 9 total – 3 per shift | $ 76,600 | $ 689,400 |
| Sergeants | 3 total – 1 per shift | $114,000 | $ 342,000 |
| Lieutentant | 1 total | $126,000 | $ 126,000 |
| Clerk | 1 total | $ 50,000 | $ 50,000 |
| **TOTAL** |  |  | **$ 1,987,400** |

**PHASE 2 - QUICK CLEARANCE TOWING COMPONENT**

Quick clearance of traffic incidents is a highly-effective approach for reducing traffic congestion and improving mobility on freeways. It also shortens the amount of time that both stranded motorists and the responders that assist them are exposed to freeway traffic. The longer traffic is impacted by an incident, the risk of a secondary crash increases. Removing the vehicle(s) involved as soon as possible is critical for both responder and motorist safety.

The Houston-Galveston region has proven the benefits of a quick clearance program through the City of Houston’s SAFEClear program. Through contracts with the towing community, the City subsidized a free-tow program to remove motorists who were stranded on the side of the freeway to a safe location off-system. In addition, by assigning tow operators to being the primary tow responders to these incidents on designated segments of the freeway system, it prevented the rush of tow operators to an incident scene, which creates additional disruption to the system.

The proposed Towing Component will build off of the successes of the SAFEClear program and expand it throughout Harris County. The Towing Component, which will be operated by the Houston Police Department (HPD) for the City of Houston and the Harris County Sheriff’s Office (HCSO) for the remainder of Harris County, will involve the solicitation and funding of the towing industry to respond to incidents and quickly remove disabled vehicles not involved in crashes from the system to restore the flow of traffic and rapidly relocate freeway patrons from an unsafe situation. Tows for disabled vehicles not involved in crashes on the freeway will be subsidized by the program at no cost to the traveling public. Unlike the City’s program, which subsidized only tows from the freeway shoulder, the new Program will also subsidize tows from moving lanes in order to reduce confusion for the public, prevent potential altercations with stranded patrons, and to restore mobility to the system in a rapid manner.

**Overview of the Towing Component**

Due to issues such as start-up ability, jurisdictional authority, and familiarity with the concept, the Towing Component shall be two separate but similarly-operated programs managed by HPD for the City of Houston and HCSO for the remainder of Harris County. HPD, due to its previous experience, has staffing and operational ability currently in place to begin towing operations in a relatively quick manner. HCSO will require more time to ramp up its activities and will engage with other communities within the County to allow for program operations in these incorporated areas. Both programs shall operate under the same guidelines, as outlined in this document, in order to ensure consistency of service throughout the County.

The City of Houston (on behalf of HPD) and the County (on behalf of HCSO) shall solicit and contract with a qualified company or companies to provide rapid towing response to incidents that occur on the freeway system 24 hours a day, seven days a week, year-round. These contractor(s) will be assigned segments of the regional freeway system, over which they will be responsible for addressing all non-consent tows, with the exception of incidents that require heavy-duty towing services.

Tow operators that identify an immobilized vehicle shall immediately notify law enforcement at TranStar of the incident to begin the authorization process. If a tow operator receives notification of an incident by the dispatcher or law enforcement at TranStar, the tow operator has six (6) minutes to arrive at the scene.

Freeway patrons, whose vehicles become immobilized due to a stall, mechanical failure, tire failure, or any non-crash related event located anywhere on the freeway system proper (including mainlanes, shoulders, exit ramps, entrance ramps, direct connectors, and HOV/HOT lanes), shall be removed from the system at no charge to the patron.

Freeway patrons may contact their own wreckers to remove them from the freeway. However, if the contacted wrecker fails to arrive prior to a Program tow operator connecting the vehicle, the Program operator shall remove the patron, upon approval by a law enforcement officer.

Freeway patrons whose vehicles were involved in crashes, abandoned on the system, or were removed from the system due to the arrest of the driver may be charged up to the established rates imposed by the jurisdiction where the tow occurred.

Tow operators shall tow a qualifying immobilized vehicle to a location off the freeway within one mile from the nearest freeway exit that is well-lit with access to a telephone and restrooms. If there is no qualifying location, or if the patron is not comfortable with the drop-off location in question, the vehicle shall be towed to the nearest licensed storage facility that is lighted and manned on a 24-hour basis, provides the vehicle owner with access to a telephone and other facilities, and will not charge any storage-related fees for the first 24 hours.

**Service Area of Program**

The Program shall initially operate on the mainlanes, shoulders, entrance and exit ramps, direct connectors, and HOV/HOT lanes of the following freeway segments:

* Katy Freeway (IH-10 West) – IH 45 to County Line
* North Freeway (IH 45 North) – IH 10 to County Line
* Gulf Freeway (IH 45 South) – IH 10 to County Line
* Southwest Freeway (US 59 South) – IH 45 to County Line
* Eastex Freeway (US 59 North) – IH 45 to County Line
* East Freeway (IH 10 East) – IH 45 to Spur 330
* South Freeway (SH 288) – US 59 to County Line
* Northwest Freeway (US 290) – IH 610 to Mueschke
* Tomball Parkway (SH 249) – Beltway 8 to Spring Cypress
* IH 610 Loop – Entire system
* Crosby Freeway (US 90) – IH 10 to Beltway 8
* Beltway 8 – Eastex Freeway to Ella; Jacintoport to US 90; Bissonnet to West Airport

Freeway segments will expand either upon installation of Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) cameras or the implementation of technology to allow for remote viewing by TranStar from the tow operator. In addition, a study shall be undertaken to determine the feasibility of expanding Program coverage to the adjacent frontage/service roads for these facilities. HCSO will engage the local municipalities along these freeway segments to promote their inclusion in the program. In addition, it is recognized that the Program will eventually expand beyond Harris County. Implementation of the program in adjacent counties shall be handled by that County’s Sheriff.

**Tow Authorization by Law Enforcement**

A free Program tow is still considered a non-consent tow by law, requiring authorization from law enforcement whether or not the vehicle operator agrees to be towed prior to authorization. Harris County Sheriff’s (HCSO) deputies, located at Houston TranStar, will be responsible for remotely authorizing Program tows, including those located within the City of Houston. This will not preclude law enforcement on the freeway from authorizing tows when needed or when convenient.

Law enforcement shall utilize the freeway CCTV camera systems to remotely identify the incident in question. Additional research will be conducted to assess the viability of using mobile devices by tow operators to visually capture and transmit incidents to HCSO deputies to allow for approval.

If a motorist contacts its own wrecker, and the wrecker arrives prior to a wrecker operated by the Program, law enforcement authorization is not required. If a Program tow operator arrives at the scene, and the motorist-contacted tow operator arrives soon after but prior to the vehicle being loaded, the motorist has the right to use the contacted operator. If the vehicle is loaded prior to the contacted operator’s arrival, the vehicle shall not be unloaded until it is removed from the freeway.

**Bill of Rights for Motorists**

Any motorist receiving assistance as part of the Program shall receive a Bill of Rights from the tow operator, which shall explain to the motorist the service that is to be provided, as well as any rates to be charged to the motorist by the tow operator for any additional towing services required after the vehicle is removed from the freeway. This Bill of Rights shall be available in both English and Spanish.

**Responsibilities of Participating Tow Operators**

1. Tow operators shall remove wrecked or stalled vehicles from a designated segment of a freeway on a 24-hour basis, year-round, and shall respond to the scene within six (6) minutes of being dispatched;
2. Tow operators shall tow a qualifying immobilized vehicle to a location off the freeway within one mile from the nearest freeway exit that is well-lit with access to a telephone and restrooms. If there is no qualifying location, or if the patron is not comfortable with the drop-off location in question, the vehicle shall be towed to the nearest licensed storage facility that is lighted and manned on a 24-hour basis, provides the vehicle owner with access to a telephone and other facilities, and will not charge any storage-related fees for the first 24 hours.
3. Tow operators shall provide continuous coverage of its designated freeway segment, respond immediately to a call for assistance from law enforcement, and patrol its segment;
4. Tow operators shall cooperate with all law enforcement and other public service employees responding to or present at a police scene;
5. Tow operators are prohibited from soliciting business of any kind whatsoever while operating on behalf of the Program;
6. Tow operators shall respond to a police scene with no more towing capacity than necessary, based on the number of wrecked or stalled vehicles at the scene, to minimize hazards and traffic obstructions within the time designated in the agreement and will expeditiously remove from the freeway any wrecked or stalled vehicle, debris, and other traffic impediment;
7. No wrecker driver shall stop or park or allow his auto wrecker to remain stopped or parked at a police scene if the number of auto wreckers already present at the scene equals the number of wrecked or stalled vehicles; provided, that no more than two additional auto wreckers may remain at a police scene when no law enforcement officer is present.
8. If a tow operator fails to respond to a call for assistance, law enforcement shall authorize an incident management supervisor or a law enforcement officer at a police scene who has determined that public emergency then exists to direct any licensed auto wrecker to remove any wrecked or stalled vehicle, debris, or other traffic hazard or impediment;
9. Tow operators must have a mounted light bar on their vehicles that conforms to the requirements of Chapter 547 of the Texas Transportation Code
10. Tow operators must be equipped with wheel dollies, except on heavy duty wreckers and rollback type trucks
11. Tow operators must wear the following:
    1. A Class 3, Level 2 reflective vest, shirt, or jacket with a Program-approved logo meeting the ANSI/ISEA requirements for high visibility safety apparel at all times while working outside of the auto wrecker.
    2. Closed toe shoes; and
    3. A vest or shirt displaying, on the front of the shirt or vest, the name of the tow operator as it is registered with the city or county in which it operates.
12. Tow operators must have an approved Program logo, at a size to be specified, affixed to the tow vehicle in order to identify it as a participating Program operator.
13. Tow operators must have the following equipment in its vehicle:
    1. Warning devices for stopped vehicles consisting of:
       1. Three flares, each of which shall be capable of being seen at a distance of not less than 600 feet under normal conditions at nighttime, or
       2. Three emergency reflective triangles that conform to the requirements of Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard No. 125
    2. A push broom with a handle of not less than 36 inches and a head of not less than 18 inches
    3. No less than five gallons of dry sand or other absorbent that is at least as effective as sand in absorbing liquid
    4. A container to carry glass and debris cleaned from the roadway when picking up a wrecked vehicle
    5. A shovel with a flat edge of not less than nine inches and a handle of not less than 36 inches
    6. A wrecking bar of not less than 36 inches in length, with a wedge-shaped head; and
    7. At least one ten pound fire extinguisher or two five pound multiple purpose fire extinguishers, in good working condition
14. Tow operators must have the appropriate equipment to enter and transmit the tow data to the RIMS database, including a portable computer, tablet, or cell phone with photographic capabilities, communications equipment such as a cellular device capable of transmitting data, and a portable printing device to provide patrons copies of tow documentation.
15. Tow operators must install and maintain an automatic vehicle locator device on each wrecker. Operators shall pay any monthly fees associated with such system. The System’s data must be accessible to HCSO during Program operations.
16. A chief of police, county Sheriff or its designee is authorized, upon a determination of a public emergency or when required in the interest of public safety, to direct a tow operator to direct its patrol activities to specific times and/or portions of the tow operator's freeway segment;
17. Tow operators shall report any wrecked or stalled vehicle or other hazardous road condition to HCSO and remain at the scene until a law enforcement officer arrives or he receives authorization to remove the hazardous condition;

1. Tow operators shall not remove any immobilized or crashed vehicle deemed a non-consent tow without authorization by law enforcement, be that authorization given on-scene or remotely; the towing of vehicles involved in a crash may not be authorized remotely; and
2. Any wrecked or stalled vehicle removed by a Program tow operator at the direction of a law enforcement officer shall be documented on a Program vehicle disposition form developed and approved by the law enforcement agencies of the regional incident management program.

**Program Reimbursement for Qualifying Tows**

Tow operators that make a qualifying Program tow of an immobilized vehicle will be reimbursed $60.00 per qualifying tow (the amount determined by the original $50 subsidy inflated to 2014 CPI levels). To be reimbursed for any qualifying Program tow, the tow slip provided by the tow operator must have a corresponding record in the RIMS database showing law enforcement’s authorization of the tow. The reimbursement rate shall be adjusted every three years based on the change in the U.S. Consumer Price Index (CPI-US).

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| **ESTIMATED QUALIFYING TOW COSTS** | | | |
| **Towing Costs** | **Tows** | **Tow Subsidy** | **Total** |
| City of Houston Tows | 68,000 Tows | $60/tow | **$ 4,080,000** |
| Harris County Tows | 15,000 Tows | $60/tow | **$ 900,000** |
|  |  | **TOTAL:** | **$ 4,980,000** |

**Procurement and Qualification of Participating Tow Operators**

The City of Houston (on behalf of HPD) and Harris County (on behalf of HCSO), shall procure and contract for the services of towing contractors to participate in their respective programs. While both agencies will be utilizing their respective procurement processes, both shall use similar criteria for selecting qualified contractors. To be considered for inclusion in the Program, towing contractors must meet the following set of qualifications:

* ***Experience*** - The tow operator, as a business, must have five (5) or more years of incident management experience consisting of knowledge and expertise to handle difficult vehicle recovery work, assist in restoring traffic flow, and be responsible for accident scene cleanup.
* ***Equipment Capacity*** – at least one wrecker in tow operator’s fleet for every two miles of assigned segment and a minimum of six (6) tow trucks. Contractors must have at least one flatbed or rollback tow truck stationed on their assigned segments at all times. Operators should ensure appropriate equipment capacity to meet their required performance measure or risk possible termination of contract.
* ***Financial Stability*** – to demonstrate financial soundness and stability of the business, the towing contractor must provide:
  + Credit reports from all three credit bureaus - Transit Union, Experian and Equifax;
  + Audited financial statements or other documents from financial institutions evidencing the solvency of the business;
  + Audited tax returns of the business from the previous two years.
* ***Customer Service*** – Contractors and subcontractors must be in good standing with the County, all cities they will be operating in, and the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation with the payment of fees and nature and resolution of citizen complaints.
* ***PATSA Requirement*** – Participating tow operators must meet the requirements of each jurisdiction for which they will be operating. Tow operators must have a PATSA with the law enforcement agencies within the jurisdiction in which they will be operating. Additionally, each tow operator shall hold a valid license for each jurisdiction in which they are operating.
* ***Insurance of Tow Operators*** – Towing contractors must provide proof of insurance for participating tow operators of the following:

A. Automobile liability insurance, $1,000,000.00 combined single limit per occurrence.

B. Cargo on hook coverage, $50,000.00 per vehicle.

C. Workers compensation or occupational safety insurance that will cover prolonged hospitalization and long-term disability of operators

D. All drivers of auto wreckers shall be named insured on Operator's liability insurance policy."

In addition, any tow operators participating in the Program will be subject to a comprehensive background check. Tow operators may not be eligible to participate in the Program if the operator is under indictment or convicted (including deferred adjudication) for the following:

1. Any violation of the ordinances or statutes regulating the sale, trade, servicing, storage, towing, handling, dismantling, or destruction of any motor vehicle or motor vehicle parts, accessories, or supplies.
2. Any offense involving fraud or misrepresentation.
3. Any offense involving burglary, robbery, or misdemeanor or felony theft.
4. Any offense involving bribery or perjury.
5. Any offense involving violence to any person except for conduct that is classified as no greater than a Class C misdemeanor under the laws of Texas.
6. Any felony conviction for any violation of any state or federal laws regulating firearms.
7. Any offense involving forgery.
8. Any offense involving the theft or unauthorized use of a motor vehicle, or burglary of a motor vehicle.
9. Any offense involving prostitution or the promotion of prostitution.
10. Any offense involving rape, sexual abuse, sexual assault, enticing of a child, rape of a child, sexual abuse of a child or indecency with a child.
11. Any offense involving misdemeanor or felony possession or delivery of drugs.
12. Four or more moving violations of the traffic laws of this state or any other state, each of which arises from a separate incident, occurring within any 12 month period during the three years immediately preceding the application for a license or of the notice of a hearing for revocation of a license.
13. Any offense involving driving a motor vehicle while intoxicated, whether under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or both.
14. Any other offense involving moral turpitude.

Participating Program tow operators found convicted of any of the above offenses shall have their participation terminated. If indicted with an offense, participation can be suspended and/or revoked.

**Tow Dispatching**

Currently, the towing dispatch function for the SAFEClear program is conducted by the SAFEClear Management Group, which is a consortium of the tow operators involved in the program. The dispatchers are currently paid $10-12/hour with no benefits, which has resulted in a high turnover rate. In addition, dispatching costs came out of the $50 subsidy for the tows provided, which is now funded by the towing fee.

contractors will support operations at Houston Transtar by providing dispatching services directly to tow operators and to contractor locations.  Services would include the support system for input of data and other related activities for documentation of towing services and work with the law enforcement agencies to provide support to facilitate the operation of the incident management program.  The services would be financed by the IM Contractors through an organization created by the Contractors who will have officers related to duties associated with the incident management program

It is recommended that the tow dispatchers, as part of this program, receive an increase in pay to $15/hour and that benefits be provided for these dispatchers. The dispatchers would be employed by the Harris County Sheriff’s Office. The dispatchers will be responsible for monitoring the transportation system and keeping communications with HCSO floor staff to identify incidents requiring a tow. Dispatchers will be responsible for alerting the appropriate tow operators of incidents requiring their service and notifying HCSO staff of incidents when required. While these dispatchers would not require the level of training and certification as the HCSO dispatchers on the TranStar floor, a similar level of professionalism will be expected.

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| **ESTIMATED TOWING DISPATCH COSTS** | | | |
| **Towing Dispatch** | **Dispatchers** | **Hourly Costs** | **Total** |
| Dispatchers w/Benefits | 2 per shift | $27/hr | **$473,040** |

**Training Requirements**

Participating tow operators must receive Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation (TDLR) approved training for the safe towing practices and for multiagency incident management that adheres to SHRP2 requirements. Training must include Roadside Safety and Traffic Incident Management, for which proof of training of participating operators must be provided. Refresher courses in these two areas must be taken every three years. Participating tow operators must also take annual towing-related continuing education/professional development credits to increase their knowledge of safe operating practices. Tow contractors must maintain records of these CEUs/PDHs for its operators and subcontractors to ensure compliance.

**Monthly Meetings**

Participating towing contractors shall be required to attend monthly meetings to address any issues relating to the operation of the Program, including program changes, program performance, complaints, and after-action reviews.

**RIMS Enhancement**

The Regional Incident Management System (RIMS) database shall be the official system for the tracking of all Program tows. Dispatchers and law enforcement at Houston TranStar shall utilize RIMS to track all Program incidents including incident identification, verification, response time, and clearance time. Law enforcement shall use the system to authorize Program tows.

Efforts shall be made to upgrade RIMS to facilitate accurate data collection and quicker tow authorizations. Technologies shall be integrated to allow for quicker on-scene data collection by tow operators, including the transmittal of driver’s license data, vehicle identification numbers (VINs), GIS coordinates of the incident, and photographs or videos of the incident scene to facilitate scene clearance and allow for quicker approval. RIMS will be accessible via the Internet by tow operators to allow for transmission of scene information from their vehicles to the RIMS system.

Tow slips for each towing event will be generated from the event data entered into RIMS database in order to ensure consistency between the database and documentation provided to tow operators and patrons. Tow operators will be able to print out a tow slip from the system via required computer and printing equipment installed in their vehicles. The system will also allow for tow operators to e-mail the tow slips to patrons upon request.

The RIMS database shall also be the system from which billings for Program tows will be generated. Requests for reimbursement for tows that do not have a corresponding record of an authorized tow in the RIMS database shall not be reimbursed.

**Tracking of Towed Vehicles**

Participating law enforcement agencies shall utilize the Find My Towed Car Website (<http://findmytowedcar.com>) to catalog where vehicles towed under the Program are being stored.

**Hurricane Evacuation Activities**

Contractors for the Program shall operate during a hurricane evacuation at maximum available capacity to help ensure rapid clearance of disabled vehicles impeding the flow of evacuating residents. Failure to provide service during an evacuation event may result in the termination of the contract.

**Reporting to Stakeholders**

Program activities shall be reported at all regularly-held Incident Management Executive and Advisory Committee meetings. Reports shall at least consist of the number of Program tows made, performance measures of the program such as response times and clearance times, and any significant activities that have occurred during the month. Presentations on the Program shall be made upon request by cities impacted by the program, as well as the Transportation Policy Council.

**Audit Process**

In order to identify potential weaknesses, ensure proper record-keeping and to prevent fraudulent activity, the Program should be audited on a regular basis. An internal audit should be conducted annually by one of the participating agencies on the Incident Management Executive Committee. A formal audit shall be conducted on the Program by an independent auditor every two years.

**Public Relations Campaign**

A public relations campaign will be undertaken prior to the implementation of the Program to make the driving public aware of the service that is being provided on the region’s freeway. The driving public needs to be aware that the tow operators in the Program are part of a coordinated, multi-agency effort to ensure motorist safety, rapidly restore flow to the freeway system after an incident, and to prevent secondary crashes from occurring. The campaign should focus on the following:

* The development of Program branding so the traveling public can identify participating tow operators.
* Education of the public of the role of law enforcement in the Program for authorizing every qualifying tow to ensure oversight of tow operators and their activities.
* Education of motorists of their rights for the Program.
* Engagement of print, radio, television, and social media to inform the public of the Program, including how it operates, who is involved, qualifications of participants, and the rights and benefits of motorists.
* Engagement of the business community to promote the economic benefit of quick clearance for the transport of goods and services.
* Promotion of “Move Over/Slow Down” when a tow operator is addressing an incident to promote tow operator safety.
* The development of Spanish-language outreach for the above-mentioned items.

**Estimated Costs**

The following are the estimated costs for the Quick Clearance Towing Component. TxDOT has offered H-GAC funding for a quick-clearance program. Harris County figures assume a delayed implementation both time-wise and geographically. This document shall serve as the proposal document to TxDOT in response to its offer:

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **ESTIMATED QUICK CLEARANCE PROGRAM COSTS** | | | |
| **Towing Costs** | **Tows** | **Tow Subsidy** | **Total** |
| City of Houston Tows | 68,000 Tows | $60/tow | **$ 4,080,000** |
| Harris County Tows | 15,000 Tows | $60/tow | **$ 900,000** |
|  |  |  |  |
| **Towing Dispatch** | **Dispatchers** | **Hourly Costs** | **Total** |
| Dispatchers w/Benefits | 2 per shift | $27/hr | **$473,040** |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  | **TOTAL:** | **$ 5,453,040** |

**PHASE 3 – DEDICATED FREEWAY LAW ENFORCEMENT FIELD PRESENCE**

Upon identification and availability of additional funding beyond system surveillance and quick clearance activities, efforts need to be made to build up a dedicated field presence of law enforcement on the freeway to ensure appropriate scene control and traffic management in the event of an incident. Law enforcement officers that patrol freeways may also patrol other off-system roadways. An off-system incident could result in delay in addressing a freeway incident. Installing a dedicated freeway field presence, specifically trained in incident management, will facilitate the processing of freeway crashes in a timelier manner and help ensure the safety of those involved, including the responders, as well as to better direct traffic around the incident.

Due to the labor force and resources required, the cost of a dedicated field presence can raise costs considerably depending on the level of coverage desired. It is recommended that initial funding be identified to conduct dedicated field operations during peak commuting periods (Monday-Friday, 6am-10am and 3pm-7pm). Upon identification of additional funding, field presence is recommended to be extended to at least a 16/5 operation, if not a 24/7 operation. Funding research will be conducted after Phases 1 and 2 have begun implementation.

Field presence coverage should be assessed based on required response times, historic incident activity and appropriate performance models. Higher levels of traffic may require additional presence due to resulting delays for officers fighting said traffic to get to a scene. It is suggested as part of assessing potential field presence that pilot implementations be rolled out to more accurately determine appropriate staffing. Potential pilot recommendations for consideration involve a joint HPD-HCSO operation on one of the following freeway segments:

* IH-45/North Freeway from Downtown to the Montgomery County line.
* IH-10/East Freeway from Downtown to Spur 330
* US 290/Northwest Freeway from IH 610 to SH 99 (depending on construction impacts)

**GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE**

This Incident Management program will be governed by an Executive Board of representatives from participating agencies, akin to the TranStar Executive Committee. The executive board will be responsible for addressing policy matters, approving budgets, and setting priorities for the program.

It is recommended that the initial make-up of this Executive Board consist of the following agencies:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * Harris County Sheriff’s Office * Houston Police Department * METRO PD * Harris County Public Infrastructure | * City of Houston Public Works * METRO HOV System Management * TxDOT * H-GAC |

This Board may wish to consider future representation from one smaller city located on the freeway system (Bellaire, The Villages, Pasadena, etc) to address concerns from these impacted communities. In addition, the Board may wish to invite a HCTRA representative, at least in a non-voting function, to address issues where toll-road and freeway functions intersect (IH-10 Managed Lanes, entrance/exit connections). In addition, as the program grows beyond Harris County, this Board will need to allow for inclusion of adjacent county representation in its membership.

**ADVISORY STRUCTURE**

In addition, there will be a technical advisory group that will serve to provide input and guidance for the operations of the program and review recommendations to the Executive Board. This body will consist of representatives of the participating agencies that are involved in the various aspects of incident management, including law enforcement, towing, fire department, Hazmat, medical examiners, TxDOT, and local traffic operations staff. This body will be similar in nature to the TranStar Leadership Committee and TranStar Incident Management Workgroup.

**ADMINISTRATIVE COMPONENT**

It is recommended that H-GAC serve as the Administrative Entity, which would be responsible for a variety of issues including funding management, program accounting, program reporting, training and addressing issues that arise. Proposed responsibilities for H-GAC staff include the following:

* Financial management of the program, which will include fund management, accounting, and coordination of payments to participating agencies and service providers.
* Organizing incident After-Action Reviews (AARs) for incidents of significance.
* Coordinating training for incident responders.
* Holding regular meetings for participating agencies to address issues that may arise
* Monitoring and reporting of program performance
* Educating policymakers and the motoring public about the program

**NEXT STEPS**

The following activities will need to be undertaken within the next few months to implement the proposed Program:

1. Upon agreement by HPD and HCSO, this framework is to be approved by the City and County respectively.
2. H-GAC will provide this framework to TxDOT for review and to use as the scope of work for the TxDOT funding offered.
3. H-GAC will finalize its incident responder training program and begin offering regular trainings, either quarterly or bi-monthly
4. H-GAC will procure the services of a process development specialist to review proposed and past program practices to hone processes and develop/codify a set of operating procedures for the Program
5. H-GAC will modify its agreement with HCSO to include TranStar Floor Staffing to handle surveillance and dispatching activities.
6. TxDOT and its contractor will modify the RIMS system to allow for enhanced incident record keeping, transmission of data from tow vehicles, and provision of billing information for subsidized tows.
7. Upon agreement with TxDOT, H-GAC will enter into Intergovernmental Agreements with the City of Houston and Harris County to fund the Quick Clearance component of the Program.
8. City of Houston will re-procure for towing companies to implement the City’s Quick Clearance component. The City will need to revamp its towing ordinance to a) reinstate the subsidy for qualifying tows and b) expand qualifying tows to the entirety of the freeway (excluding service/frontage roads).
9. Conduct a public relations campaign that educates the public about the Quick Clearance program and its services.
10. Harris County will begin development of its Quick Clearance component. Implementation of these activities will most likely be phased. This will include:
    1. Modification of its towing ordinances to mirror the City of Houston’s
    2. The development of a preliminary deployment plan for the unincorporated areas,
    3. Discussions with incorporated communities outside of the City of Houston to allow for Quick Clearance operations
    4. The procurement of towing companies

This program is anticipated to grow beyond Harris County into adjacent counties in future years. Efforts shall be undertaken to grow the program into these counties. The efforts within Harris County will allow for monitoring, analysis, and modification of the Program prior to implementation in adjacent counties. In addition, modifications to Texas Statutes will need to be made in order to allow for countywide operations by the various Sheriff’s Departments. While discussions with these counties will begin soon after implementation in Harris County, it will probably be at least 2-3 years before the program grows beyond Harris County.