



**5 Year Strategic Plan
January 2009 through December 2013**

Williamson County Emergency Communications 5 Year Strategic Plan

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Document Revision History			
Version	Date	Author/s	Status
1.0	01/09	P. Cobb	First Draft
1.1	01/09	P. Cobb	Final Draft

1 Executive Summary

In the latter part of 2008, the Williamson County Emergency Communications Department began to develop a multi-year Strategic Plan to guide the organization's development over the next five (5) year planning cycle. Much effort was invested into it ensuring that Williamson County would continue to build on its key strengths and leverage its resources to effectively and efficiently support its mission, vision and goals. A steering committee of public safety professionals from various focus areas was formed to identify opportunities for improvement and, with the support of local governing executives, set about the task of implementing key initiatives. The steering committee was also charged with overseeing, updating and objectively evaluating progress of various initiatives and, importantly, providing critical input into the development of a Strategic Plan.

The goals outlined in this Strategic Plan will require continued and sustained investment over several fiscal years to achieve their intended objectives. They will require the commitment and action of various local and regional stakeholders, as well as the coordination and collaboration of regional and state-level public safety partners including, but not limited to, traditional public safety organizations (e.g., police, fire, EMS) and private sector organizations (e.g., hospital, critical care centers).

The Strategic Plan is organized into sections as illustrated in the table below:

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This Strategic Plan contains three (3) multi-year goals or directives:

1. Operational Readiness
2. Enhanced Customer / Stakeholder Services
3. Proactive Management

Each of the items outlined under the three (3) goals are fundamental in meeting the Plan's mission of positioning further the ability of Williamson County to provide effective emergency communications, emergency management and emergency services to the citizens of Williamson County and its professional public safety organizations.

2 Director's Letter

To the Readers of this Plan:

Williamson County Emergency Communications has an extraordinary history of service to the citizens of Williamson County and Central Texas. Throughout its decades of service, Williamson County has continually evolved, prepared for and responded to challenges posed by natural disasters and destructive human acts.

Williamson County Emergency Communications serves as the regional pivotal link in the critical public safety and emergency response chain by ensuring the County's readiness to receive, respond to / coordinate with area public safety partners, and recover from natural and human-caused emergencies and disasters and by strengthening law enforcement capabilities, promoting public safety and crime prevention and assisting victims of crime and community problems (e.g., health, quality of life). At the state level, Williamson County has a well deserved reputation for serving and assisting local governments and regional communities by way of, for example, mutual aid assistance, and is the premier provider of on-point professional emergency communications and emergency management services in the region. In addition, Williamson County is the point-of-contact for regional and state-level emergency management and emergency services grant activities, ranging from emergency response, hazard mitigation, crime prevention and rescue / recovery activities.

It gives me great pleasure to introduce the Williamson County Emergency Communications 5-Year Strategic Plan (2009-2013). This plan was developed with the input of Williamson County's management and executive level members, public safety practitioners and subject matter experts. The plan supports key initiatives that support Williamson County's commitment to proactive operational readiness, service delivery excellence and client support enhancement. This plan will be updated annually to ensure it reflects current issues and serves the needs of Williamson County, its public safety partners (including public and private sector organizations) and its customers / stakeholders.

Your support in providing input to and implementing this plan is vital to the safety of Williamson County's citizens and its first responder corps including law enforcement, emergency medical services, firefighters and emergency management professionals. I encourage your continued participation in this plan's initiatives.

Patrick N. Cobb

Patrick Cobb, Director
Emergency Communications
Williamson County, Texas

3 History

Williamson County Emergency Communications, as the department is known today, began as a division of the Williamson County Sheriff's Office. Initially, communications was primarily focused on receiving emergency and non-emergency calls for service from unincorporated areas of Williamson County. These calls were processed and dispatched to the appropriate agencies. Technology was limited with no 911 telephone services, paper records with no computer automation of any kind, and basic VHF and UHF radio systems.

For many years, the primary career emergency service agency dispatched was the Sheriff's Office. Emergency medical services were referred to local funeral homes as was customary at the time and all fire services were provided by volunteer departments. Division staffing was limited to one or two combined call taker/dispatcher positions per shift. These personnel also performed other law enforcement duties such as warrant services, jail services, records management, and other "police" related duties.

3.1 Population / Call Volume Growth

Over the years as population and call volume increased, Williamson County's responsibilities to provide emergency services also grew. Emergency communications was also impacted by these factors and the division continued to grow and add personnel. Establishing countywide Enhanced 911 (E/911) addressing was initiated and several of what once were small community volunteer fire departments transitioned into paid career departments. In addition, countywide emergency medical services was created as a paid career department in 1975 as the result of a partnership between the county and Georgetown Hospital.

Population and call volume increases forced the introduction of new technologies to assist in emergency communications during the mid 1990's. The City of Georgetown in partnership with Williamson County purchased a single site analog 800MHz trunked Motorola radio system in 1996. Shortly thereafter, the City of Round Rock also joined the system and subsequently Cedar Park in 2000 and Leander, Hutto, and Taylor in 2008. Three additional trunked tower sites were erected at strategic locations across the county to maximize radio coverage; one additional tower site is in progress now with two more planned in the next two years. This will bring the total trunked radio system site locations to seven. The first computer aided dispatch solution (CAD) was purchased by the Sheriff's Office in 1996 in conjunction with the purchase of a computerized court and jail records management system.

3.2 Communications Division Restructuring

In 1997, with the implementation of countywide 911 addressing, CAD, and the new 800MHz analog radio system co-owned by multiple jurisdictions, the communications division of the Sheriff's Office was re-structured and made a separate autonomous

department in the county organizational structure: Williamson County E-911 Communications.

From 1997 to September 2006, the department continued to grow at a minimal pace in personnel and operator positions. The original location within the Sheriff's Office had changed and the number of positions grew from four call-taker dispatch positions to six fully functioning consoles and one call-taker position. CAD and RMS technology however had not changed and suffered from a lack of functionality, upgrades, improvements and replacement. County population and call volume had increased several folds during this time. For example, population in 2000 was reported as approximately 147,000. In 2006, this number had grown to well over 315,000 with no increase in 911 department personnel or technology to meet these demands.

In 2005, interoperability between the many public safety agencies in the county; and with agencies surrounding Williamson County principally Travis County and the City of Austin reached critical mass. Several federal grant programs were available to improve emergency communications and emergency management. Recognizing the increased complexity of emergency management and delivery of quality emergency communications, the first *Strategic Plan* for emergency communications was developed. Several of the principal elements of this plan have been achieved to a high degree of success or are in progress.

3.3 Grant Funded Regional Communications

\$6 million dollars in federal grant funding was awarded to Williamson County and the City of Austin to establish a new regional digital P25 compliant trunked 800MHz radio system in the fall of 2005. Subsequently, Williamson County upgraded the existing analog system to digital then linked the system to the City of Austin's identical system creating a wide area regional public safety radio system. In addition, several public safety agencies in the county had historically operated on VHF systems. These agencies also transitioned to digital 800MHz joining the county system. For the first time in history, all public safety agencies in the county operated on the same P25 system providing 100% interoperability. The project was completed in less than three years, is considered a *national model*, and has proven very successful since implementation in January of 2008. In addition to receiving and applying grant funds for radio system upgrades, the county issued certificate of obligation bonds in January of 2006 to fund the design and construction of a new state of the art emergency operations and communications center (which currently does not exist).

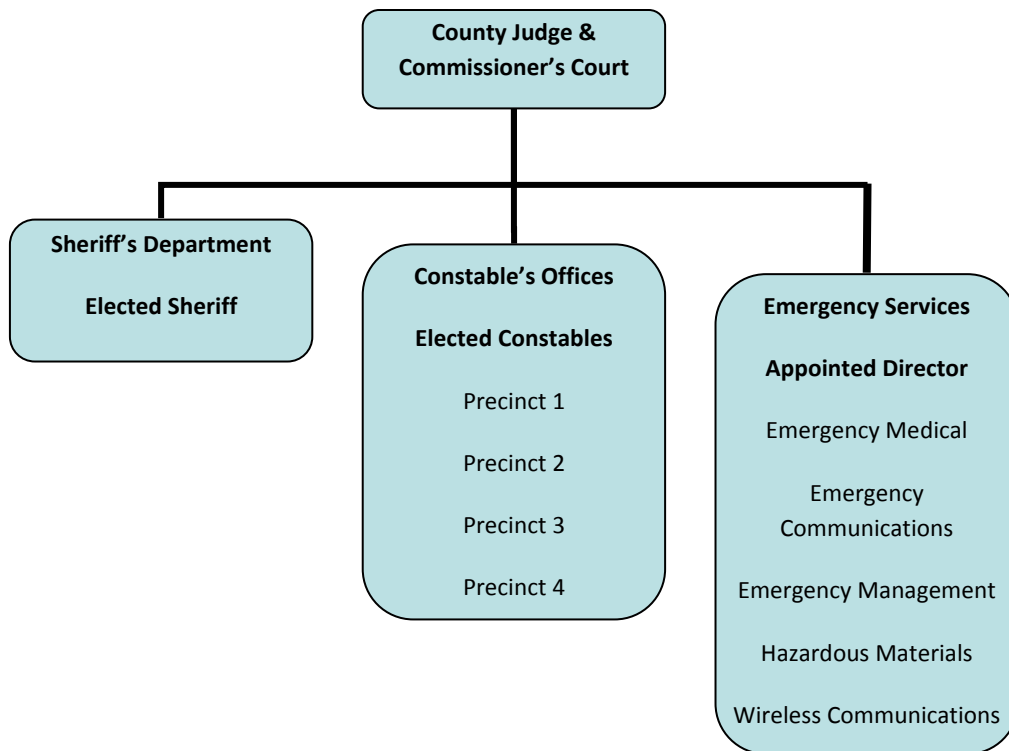
Recognizing the need for new technology, additional personnel, and appropriate newly remodeled facilities to meet increasing demands until a new facility could be built; county officials re-structured the department once again in September 2006. This re-structuring allowed additional senior management positions and officially began the remodeling of the then existent seven position 911 Center into a new fifteen position facility and additional administrative offices. The training division within communications was moved to a newly remodeled facility in Georgetown near the 911

Center. This is the current mode of operations and will remain so until such time a new facility has been built.

With the remodeling of the Radio Communications Operations Floor completed in December 2007, and the digital radio system upgrades completed shortly afterwards, the department went operational in the new operations room on new telephone and radio equipment January 22, 2008. This more than doubled the personnel space and operations capacity of the department. Even with this much needed expansion; call volume statistics from 2005 to 2008 indicated an approximate increase of 30% annually. To further illustrate the increased demands on the department, the more than 30 public service agencies served by the department have also endured substantial growth in personnel and equipment. In correlation, the number of “on-view” or “officer initiated activities” also increased proportionally placing additional burdens on the communications staff.

3.4 Organizational Realignment

To streamline emergency operations at the county level and improve customer service, Williamson County officials re-aligned several public safety agencies in March 2008. This new organizational structure created the Division of Emergency Services managed by an executive level senior director charged with oversight of six departments each managed by a department director; emergency medical services, emergency communications, emergency management, hazardous materials, wireless communications, and mobile outreach services. This re-alignment effectively placed all county level emergency service agencies under an executive director or elected officials as illustrated in the figure below:



As previously mentioned, the original strategic plan developed in 2005 was focused on achieving key target goals. The table on the following page lists these key goals and provides a status of each:

Goal Statement	Status
Obtain federal grant funds for digital radio system upgrades and transition all analog subscriber units to digital	Complete
Obtain funds and implement additional radio communications tower sites within the county improving coverage footprint following digital upgrades	Towers 1-4 complete Towers 5-7 in-progress
Obtain funds and purchase, design, and implement new computer aided dispatch, records management, mobile data, and automatic vehicle location solutions creating a regional shared database model	In-progress
Obtain funds and construct new emergency communications and operations center providing <i>all hazards</i> strategic, tactical, and “fusion center” type operational capabilities	In-progress
Remodel existing communications center maximizing available space allowing maximum staffing opportunities until new facility is completed	Complete
Transition from single stage to dual stage emergency communications operations model	Complete
Increase staffing levels of executive management, administrative staff, and telecommunicator positions	In-progress
Increase salary levels to become competitive in local markets for recruiting and retention	Complete
Alter work schedules and overtime compensation	Complete
Implement alternate staffing models maximizing staff versus call volume statistics	Complete
Adoption of national telecommunication standards from the <i>National Academy of Emergency Dispatch</i> © for law enforcement (EPD), fire (EFD), and emergency medical communications(EMD)	Complete
Develop and implement standardized communications protocols, following the national standard for 9 fire departments and emergency medical services	Complete
Develop and implement standardized communications protocols, following the national standard for the Sheriff’s Office, four Precinct Constable’s Offices, and 6 city police departments	In-progress
Develop an 8 week comprehensive telecommunications <i>Training Academy</i> for new	Complete

Goal Statement	Status
personnel	
Develop an aggressive Quality Assurance/Quality Improvement program	In-progress
Transition from All Hazards to discipline specific telecommunications	In-progress
Increase minimum personnel training standards and credentials in emergency communications and emergency management	In-progress
Create and implement county wide discipline specific telecommunication standards and procedures	In-progress
Construct, take delivery, and operate a type I mobile EOC/communications platform	Complete
Provide the highest levels of customer service to internal and external customers	Continuous
Continually strive to remain current in industry standards and technologies such as Next Generation 911 (NG911), GIS solutions, voice logging, data collection, etc.	Continuous

The original strategic plan was multi-faceted yet specific, aggressive, and detailed in nature. With excellent executive level support and successful project management, all of these initiatives have been completed or are in progress.

4 Mission

Williamson County Emergency Communications provides emergency communications and incident management support through personnel, telephone, radio, satellite, and mobile communications assets.

5 Vision

Provide the highest level of customer service possible receiving, processing, and dispatching emergency and non-emergency calls for service. Maintain a high degree of integrity and professionalism at all times. Continue to foster positive relationships with all customers and agencies served in Williamson County and the State of Texas. Enhance personnel education and credentials in emergency communications and incident management raising minimum standards wherever possible in meeting the needs of those we serve.

6 Values

- Respect
- Integrity
- Professionalism
- Collaboration
- Leadership

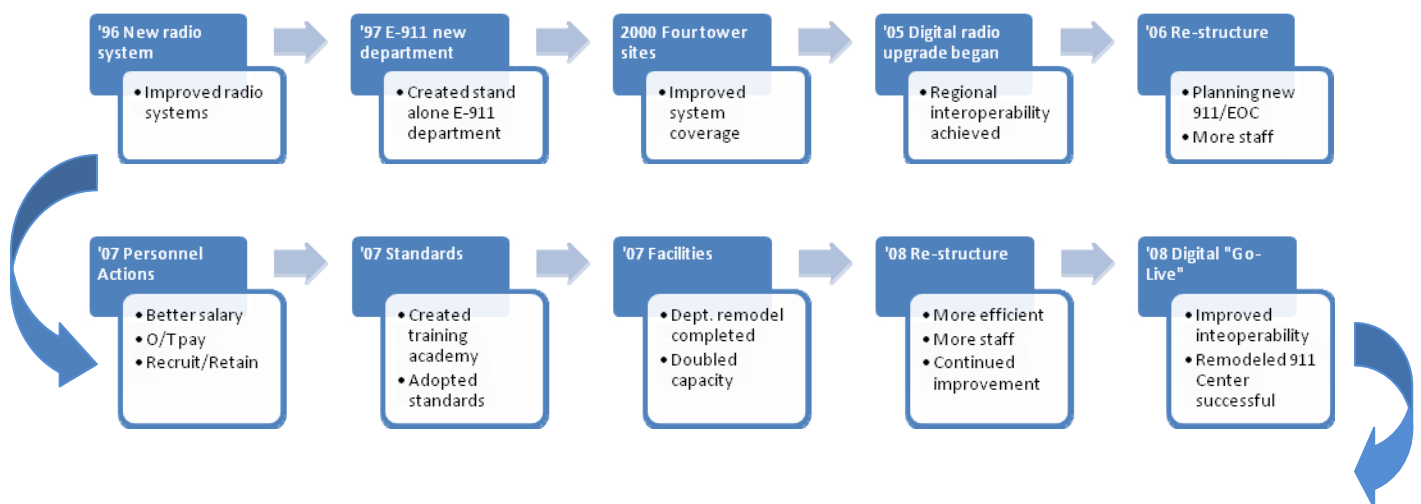
7 Guiding Principles

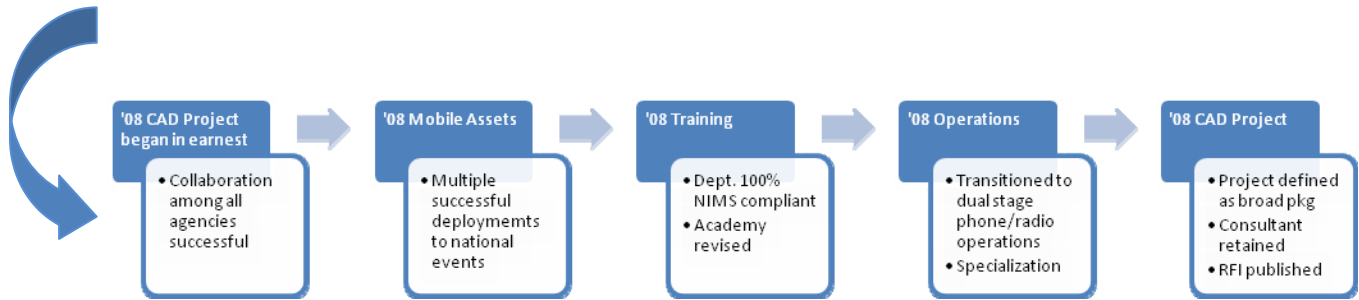
Our guiding principles are:

- Be leaders in emergency communications, emergency response and emergency management.
- Support local / regional governments and communities.
- Acknowledge that response preparedness and protection is a shared responsibility.
- Recognize that the primary responsibility for emergency communications and emergency response resides at the local level.
- Value the roles and contributions of our employees.
- Maintain the highest degree of professionalism and personal integrity in carrying out our public safety mission.
- Promote effective communications and a productive, collaborative environment.
- Provide quality customer service and continuous process improvement.
- Support professional growth and readiness.

8 Timeline Summary

The figure below illustrates the timeline and major project milestones of the previous Strategic Plan:





Clearly, Williamson County has experienced tremendous growth in many areas. The original **Strategic Plan** has largely been successful in improving the level of customer service to all served by the department. The time frame in which these milestones have been met is, without question, remarkable. So much so that the original **Strategic Plan** has been revised and refined to provide enhanced strategic direction to the department and those customers who may be impacted for the next five year period. One should consider this a “living document” with continual revisions as may be necessary.

9 Goals and Strategies

The successful delivery of competent emergency communications services to all served is the highest priority of Williamson County. To do so requires continuous reviews and refinements, education and training, quality assurance programs, and qualified personnel. Multiple forms of technology such as radio, telephone, computer, software, etc. must function successfully as a comprehensive and cohesive solution in order to bring the full weight of emergency services to bear on whatever emergency the community may be confronted with.

This Strategic Plan is divided into three (3) main categories: Operational Readiness, Enhanced Customer / Stakeholder Services and Proactive Management. Section 9.1 through 9.3 of this document provides insight to expected needs and challenges in these key areas.

As discussed in other sections, several major multi-million dollar projects are in-progress that directly impact emergency communications. Close coordination must be maintained between these areas so as to leverage one project with another in harmony. Maximizing similar components or elements in collaboration with each other will provide a better overall program in the future, versus competing interests, duplications, and lack of coordination. The term *Interoperability* is typically reserved for radio voice communications. However, as it relates to the Williamson County Emergency Communications Department, all components including, but not limited to, facilities, personnel, equipment, computer and telephone technology, and GIS solutions must successfully “interoperate” in order to provide the highest level of customer service to those we serve in emergency communications.

9.1 Operational Readiness

Goal No. 1: Ensure adequate staffing in the Communications Center at all times.

- a. Closely examine periodic call volume reports for both emergency and non-emergency telephone calls for service.
- b. Collaborate with served agencies determining appropriate telecommunicators are staffed to meet radio communications demand.
- c. Monitor special conditions such as inclement weather and expected increases in holiday traffic and staff accordingly.
- d. Through the use of mandatory overtime policies and emergency callbacks; ensure staffing levels are maintained during unexpected periods of short staffing issues.
- e. Be diligent in the authorization of scheduled time-off or education times to have minimal impact on staffing.
- f. Keep unscheduled time-off to a minimum.
- g. Collaborate with customer agencies maintaining close relationships, perform needs assessments, and provide measurable performance when warranted.

- h. Monitor customer agencies for personnel and equipment changes effecting channel loading or channel requirements.
- i. Keep current on demographic and population statistics in the county anticipating future needs of customer agencies and emergency communications.

Goal No. 2: Maintain a high degree of competency.

- a. Continuous QA/QI program with performance feedback to personnel.
- b. Monitor trends in performance and note areas that are deficient individually and collectively as a department in the performance of specific calls for service.
- c. Collaboration between QA/QI and Training Division ensuring proper training and education is provided all personnel; and that proficiency is maintained through continuous education program.
- d. Comprehensive initial training and credentialing of new personnel through an in-depth training academy.
- e. Review and participate in regional, state, and national bodies monitoring or developing requirements, regulations, and changes in industry standards.
- f. Ensure department is vigilant in the procurement, development, and implementation of new technologies that raise the levels of customer service.
- g. Regularly monitor radio operations for channel loading, usage, and interoperability issues making changes where necessary.

Goal No. 3: Recruit and retain the best personnel possible.

- a. Continuously monitor competing agencies salaries and compensation packages.
- b. Participate in local, regional, and state job fairs or other recruiting venue opportunities seeking qualified applicants for employment.
- c. Perform detailed background and pre-employment testing seeking qualified personnel.
- d. Apply personnel management policies in a prudent and judicious manner at all levels of management.
- e. Strive to increase salaries whenever possible and be a leader in total compensation.
- f. Provide as many opportunities as possible for personnel to make a positive impact on the department improving the level of customer service to all.

Goal No. 4: Maintain a high morale level and *esprit-de-corps*.

- a. "Praise in Public and Punish in Private".
- b. Reward employees whenever possible and acknowledge accomplishments and milestones met; both as a department and as an individual.
- c. Provide professional uniforms to all personnel with standards on wear and use.
- d. Be positive at every opportunity and treat performance issues as educational in nature until circumstances dictate otherwise.

9.2 Enhanced Customer / Stakeholder Services

Goal No. 5 Provide comprehensive computer aided dispatch (CAD) services to all customers served.

- a. Procure, design, and implement a new state-of-the-art computer aided dispatch system.
- b. Provide detailed education and instruction of the use of the new system to maximize efficiency.
- c. Collaborate with field agencies developing policies and standards for the use of CAD and other modules such as mobile data, automatic vehicle location, unit routing, etc.

Goal No. 6: Assist customers with the use of a new Records Management System.

- a. Provide first level user troubleshooting and remedies.
- b. Assist with access of system, data entry, data mining, and reporting, etc.

Goal No. 7: Maintain high level of confidence in public safety radio system.

- a. Continue participation in local, regional, state, and national bodies for the planning and implementation of interoperability standards.
- b. Ensure dispatch consoles and field radios are appropriately programmed and provide required levels of interoperability.
- c. Maintain accurate radio alias database for officer/unit safety.
- d. Collaborate with other departments ensuring radio coverage footprint of county system is improved to 100% wherever possible.

Goal No. 8: Maintain high degree of readiness and ability to coordinate emergency communications or incident management activities.

- a. Ensure mobile communications/EOC assets are mission capable minimizing out of service time.
- b. Ensure all mobile communications equipment is in good working order and personnel are appropriately trained in its use.
- c. Continue development of personnel and equipment participating on the Incident Dispatch Team (IDT) or Incident Management Team (IMT).
- d. Provide appropriate uniforms and personal protective equipment (PPE) for the IDT and other deployable personnel providing incident based communications or incident management.
- e. Maintain position as Primary Warning Point for the county; ensure emergency notification system(s) are functional, exercised, and used appropriately.

Goal No. 9: Collaborate in the design, construction, and operation of a new joint emergency communications/emergency operations center.

- a. Continue close relationships with executive sponsors and stakeholders in developing spatial needs and functional requirements.
- b. Determine building longevity requirements developing staffing, maintenance, expansion, upgrades, and cost models for a 50 year hardened facility.
- c. Ensure current technologies being considered compliment the design and use of a new facility; and vice versa.
- d. Continue knowledge of emerging technologies and consider those in functional requirements and future facility upgrades or enhancements.

9.3 Proactive Management

Goal No. 10: Provide for competent and decisive management of the emergency communications center during periods of normal operation that is scalable to major incidents or disaster management when conditions warrant.

- a. Ensure management personnel are trained and credentialed to effectively manage the center, personnel, and technologies under normal conditions.
- b. Ensure management personnel and modes of operations are scalable to effectively manage major incidents or disasters when necessary.
- c. All management personnel will continue to train in both emergency communications and emergency management areas exceeding minimal requirements wherever possible.
- d. All management personnel will continue to focus on general management theories, practices, and techniques improving employee relations and department performance.
- e. All management personnel are expected to seek management credentials in both public safety emergency communications and *all hazards* emergency management whenever practical.
- f. Ensure the department maintains NIMS compliance.
- g. Ensure department standards, procedures, training manuals, and emergency operations plans are current and effective in preparing, responding, recovering, and mitigating any hazard to emergency communications or the provision thereof.
- h. Actively participate in the refinement of appropriate interoperability plans at the local, regional, state, and national levels.
- i. Collaborate with executive sponsors for continued financial support of the department mission and personnel compensation.
- j. Foster and maintain positive working relationships with all customers; both internal and external.
- k. Ensure department maintains compliance with all applicable rules, regulations, and laws governing the use of law enforcement database management, 911 telephone use, and the provision of emergency communications.
- l. Be diligent in *change management* practices taking into consideration the impact of new technologies, new standards, and new personnel on the department ensuring customer service levels remain high.

In closing, this *strategic plan* is considered a living document with periodic reviews and refinement necessary as missions change and circumstances dictate. Additional publications will be developed as required to devise specific tactics to ensure these strategic directives are achieved with a high degree of success.

This document has been reviewed and approved by appropriate Williamson County executive leaders and department personnel.

Approved as to form and content:

Patrick N. Cobb

12 Jan 2009

Patrick Cobb
Director, Emergency Communications

Date

John Sneed
Director, Emergency Services

Date

Dan Gattis, County Judge
Williamson County Commissioners Court

Date