

Benefits of a consolidated model for Emergency Communications in B.C.

October 2026

Established in 1999, E-Comm operates as a not-for-profit corporation and has evolved to provide:

- 9-1-1 service for 25 of B.C.'s 27 regional districts spanning from Vancouver Island to the Alberta and U.S. borders, to north of Prince George;
- emergency call-taking and dispatch service for more than 70 police agencies and fire departments in B.C.;
- the largest multi-jurisdictional, tri-service emergency radio system in the province used by police, fire and ambulance personnel within Metro Vancouver.

E-Comm serves to support public safety in communities across B.C., in partnership with police, fire, and emergency health (ambulance) providers. Throughout our 25 years of service delivery, E-Comm is often asked: *what are the benefits of this consolidated model of emergency communications?*

Value of the consolidated model

In 2026, E-Comm asked Ernst & Young (EY) to undertake a study comparing the cost of delivering 9-1-1 call-answer and police communications services through E-Comm's consolidated model versus a standalone municipal or regional model. EY's comparison took core cost drivers—population, call volume, staffing requirements, and overhead—to estimate annual operating costs across a range of community sizes, while highlighting key trade-offs between cost efficiency and local control.

This study concluded that the consolidated model for emergency communications in B.C. has two key benefits:

- a. The consolidated model is **more cost-effective**;
- b. The consolidated model **offers additional benefits**, particularly surge capacity, multi-agency interoperability, more resiliency, workforce depth, shared technology investment and coordination across agencies.

E-Comm spreads the fixed costs of 24/7 emergency communications—including staffing, technology and overhead—across a service population of roughly 5.6 million people. A standalone municipality has to absorb those fixed costs on its own.

The cost gap is largest for smaller populations where 24/7 staffing requirements create a fixed cost base that does not scale down. Even at larger population sizes (+500k), standalone remained more expensive.

Why it's more cost-effective

Emergency communications requires trained staff and supporting systems around the clock, even when call volumes are low. A standalone operation must fund sufficient coverage for leave, training, supervision and periods of higher demand. It is more cost effective to pool

resources to answer calls vs. staffing to minimum requirements, and to share costs of facilities, technology and support services versus incurring those costs at each individual municipality.

What was compared

EY used E-Comm workload and compensation inputs, industry research and staffing assumptions to estimate standalone operating costs. EY assumed a minimum of two continuously staffed call-taking positions for standalone 9-1-1 call answer. In the smallest scenario, serving 30,000 residents, its main cost analysis estimated approximately 16 full-time employees, including supervision and relief coverage to cover 24/7 operations.

Non-people costs, including facilities, technology maintenance, finance and people support, were assumed to represent 20–30% of total operating costs. The analysis assumed service standards broadly comparable with E-Comm's.

Illustrative annual operating cost comparisons

These are scenario estimates, not quoted fees or observed costs of existing municipal operations. The below comparison is directional and should not be interpreted as a precise estimate for any individual municipality or regional district.

9 1 1 call answer

This chart compares estimated annual 9-1-1 call-answering costs for small (30,000), medium (200,000), and large (500,000) population scenarios under standalone and consolidated service delivery models. It shows that standalone delivery is consistently more expensive across all agency sizes.

Component	Small	Medium	Large
Population	30,000	200,000	500,000
1. People costs (all services + management)	\$1.70 - \$1.81M	\$2.00M - \$2.12M	\$2.54M-\$2.70M
Total FTE (frontline + supervision)	16	19	24
2. Non-people costs (Overhead)	\$0.42M - \$0.78M	\$0.50M - \$0.91M	\$0.63M - \$1.16M
3. Total annual standalone cost	\$2.12M - \$2.59M	\$2.50M - \$3.03M	\$3.17M - \$3.86M
E-Comm fee (estimated)	\$0.07M	\$0.44M	\$1.10M

Police communications

This chart compares estimated annual **police communications costs** (emergency call-taking, non-emergency call-taking, dispatch) across small (10,000), medium (50,000), and large (180,000) municipal population scenarios under standalone and consolidated service delivery models. It shows that standalone delivery is consistently more expensive across all agency sizes.

Component	Small	Medium	Large
Population	10,000	50,000	180,000
4. People costs (all services + management)	\$3.26M - \$3.47M	\$4.07M - \$4.33M	\$7.32M - \$7.79M
Total FTE (frontline + supervision)	24	31	54
5. Non-people costs (Overhead)	\$0.82M - \$1.49M	\$1.07M - \$1.86M	\$1.83M - \$3.34M
6. Total annual standalone cost	\$4.08M - \$4.96M	\$5.09M - \$6.19M	\$9.15M - \$11.13M
E-Comm fee (modeled)	\$0.33M	\$1.64M	\$5.91M

Costs were estimated using a bottom-up model that translates each scenario's population into expected service demand, staffing requirements, and annual run-rate cost.

Important to Note:

- The financial analysis above reflects annual operating costs only and excludes several significant investments such as NG9-1-1 infrastructure, and radio systems that would be required to establish and sustain a standalone service model.
- The E-Comm fee shown is illustrative and modeled to demonstrate costs that an agency could incur, rather than an agency-specific fee estimate. Actual E-Comm fees may be higher or lower, even for agencies with similar populations, depending on agency-specific circumstances (i.e., calls per population, administrative work).

Operational benefits beyond annual cost

- **Resilience and surge capacity**

A larger operation can draw on a shared pool of trained staff and capacity across service areas when demand rises or staff are unavailable. A larger resource pool allows E-Comm to re-mobilize staff where needs arise (i.e., staff call in sick, major incidents such as the Lapu Lapu

tragedy). A consolidated model results in more reliable response during everyday call spikes and major incidents. Shared infrastructure and multiple sites also support service continuity.

- **Workforce depth and development**

Shared recruitment, training and career pathways can support a broader pool of experienced staff and specialist roles. This can help sustain expertise as services become more complex. These are advantages of scale, especially for in-demand skillsets such as police dispatchers and avoids multiple agencies competing for a limited pool of skilled staff.

- **Shared technology and specialist capability**

Emergency communications systems operate within recurring technology cycles, with major capital investments every 5-7 years to meet evolving standards (e.g., NG9-1-1, AI-assisted dispatch). Consolidation allows partners to share investment in technology renewal and access expertise in areas such as cybersecurity, quality assurance and system integration. It can also strengthen purchasing capacity.

- **Coordination across agencies**

Common platforms, protocols and training can improve information sharing and coordination during incidents involving multiple agencies or jurisdictions. A consolidated model facilitates coordination across police, fire and ambulance. Standalone providers can also achieve interoperability through shared systems and agreements, although doing so requires deliberate investment and coordination.

The trade off with local control

Standalone delivery offers direct municipal authority over priorities, staffing, service configuration and investment timing. It may simplify local decision-making and allow existing municipal facilities and corporate services to be used. A municipality may place significant value on these advantages. However, those choices should be assessed alongside the higher costs of standalone delivery and the higher operational risks.

How to use this information

For a municipality considering assessing E-Comm's value, this study provides an initial framework and assessment and supports the economic rationale for shared delivery. It also outlines the operational benefits of E-Comm's consolidated model. In parallel, E-Comm is also starting to benchmark against other consolidated service providers to provide additional data points (i.e. cost/call; cost/capita) on E-Comm's value to our partners and funders.