

Ventura Port District: Delivery of Fire Services

Summary

The 2007-2008 Ventura County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) visited the Ventura Port District (Port District) for an agency briefing. As a result of this briefing and a review of the 2006-2007 Grand Jury report, "Port Safety: Ventura Port District," several questions were raised concerning the delivery of fire services to the Ventura Harbor Area.

Interviews with the management teams from the Port District, Ventura City Fire Department (VCFD), and City of Ventura (City) revealed a long-standing and identified history of extended VCFD response times to the Harbor Area. The Grand Jury opened an investigation regarding fire services provided to the Harbor Area.

The Grand Jury found that extended response times could adversely affect residents and visitors to the Harbor Area. The Grand Jury also found that the VCFD and the Port District's Harbor Patrol have collaborated in innovative ways to find interim solutions that partially address response times. Notwithstanding these interim solutions, progress towards an ultimate resolution, i.e., building and staffing a fire station in the Ventura Harbor Area, has been delayed several years.

The Grand Jury concludes that these delays are the result of several factors including:

- proposed development of vacant land in the Harbor was redesigned at the suggestion of the City
- California Coastal Commission approval of significant new development in the Harbor
- difficulty in finding a suitable site for a new fire station
- extended negotiations for funding station construction
- an identified funding source for station staffing

The Grand Jury recognizes that some of these factors may have been resolved while others remain outstanding.

The Grand Jury recommends that the City should follow the 2005 Fire Facility and Equipment Master Plan (Fire Master Plan) recommendation to build and staff Fire Station 7 in the Harbor Area.

The Grand Jury recommends the continuation of interim measures to address extended response times.

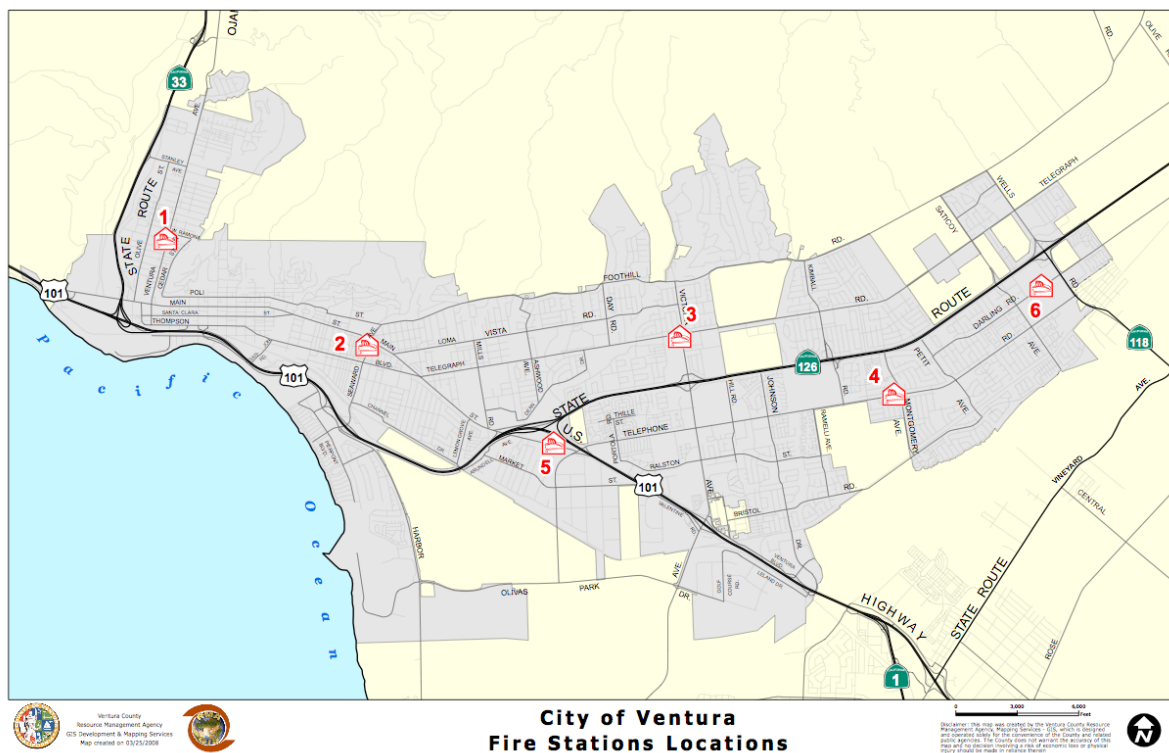
The Grand Jury recommends enhancements of these measures by extending the hours of the recently established roving fire engine.

The Grand Jury further recommends that the Harbor Patrol provide 24-hour seven days-a-week coverage.

Background

The Port District is an independent special district established in 1952 to manage the Port of Ventura. The Port District is governed by a five member Board of Port Commissioners who are appointed to four-year terms by the Ventura City Council. The Port District's current property holdings consist of 274 acres: 152 acres of land and 122 acres of water. These properties are essentially within the boundaries of the City. The City's Harbor Area includes Port District properties, Ventura Harbor, the Ventura Keys, a portion of Pierpont, and adjacent agriculture areas. The Port District established a Harbor Patrol Department in 1976 to provide enforcement of boating and waterways ordinances and to respond to other public safety concerns.

The City was incorporated in 1866. In 1878 the City formed the VCFD which is charged with providing emergency response to fire, medical, flood, hazardous material events and other calls for service within the 20 square miles of the City of Ventura. The VCFD has six fire stations. The VCFD currently employs 76 firefighters to serve a resident population of approximately 107,000. [Att-03]



Calls for VCFD services are answered by The Ventura City Police Department Emergency Communication Center and are routed to the appropriate VCFD

station(s) through an emergency 911 communication center administered by the Ventura County Fire Protection District.

The VCFD tracks response times to emergencies within the City. Response times are intended to allow for timely intervention in all emergencies. For example, in the case of medical calls, patient survival is linked to the ability of first responders to arrive on scene within five minutes.

Three factors determine response time once there is a call for service:

- time needed to take information from the caller and notify fire stations
- time for firefighters to don equipment and leave the station
- actual travel time from the station to the location of the incident

The VCFD has a total response time goal of five minutes, 90% of the time, to all areas of the City.

The City periodically reviews response times throughout the City. In 2005 the City commissioned the Fire Master Plan. The plan identified the Harbor Area as one of the areas of the City which habitually falls outside of the response time goal. It states, "There is no way to bring this area [the Harbor Area] under reasonable response time coverage from any of the current stations, with or without relocation, as evaluated during the course of this study." [Ref-01]

Methodology

The Grand Jury received an agency briefing from the Ventura Port District. Testimony was taken from the management staffs of Ventura Port District, Ventura City Fire Department, and City of Ventura. The Grand Jury also solicited and received documentation from all agencies and researched available information on the internet and newspapers.

Findings

Ventura City Fire Department

- F-01.** The VCFD staffs six fire stations located throughout the City. These stations were built to serve existing demographic needs at the time of construction. [Att-01]
- F-02.** Fire Station 6, the last station built, was constructed in East Ventura in 1988. The City's population in 1988 was approximately 90,000 and VCFD responded to 5,765 calls for service.
- F-03.** In 2007, the City population was approximately 107,000. The VCFD responded to 11,227 calls for service, 72% were for medical assistance. [Att-03]
- F-04.** The published total response time goal for the VCFD is five minutes, 90% of the time, to any point within the City.

- F-05.** The VCFD achieves the total response time goals for approximately 57% of emergency responses throughout the City.
- F-06.** In 2005, VCFD published the Fire Master Plan which examined station placement and response times for all areas of the City.
- F-07.** The National Fire Protection Association recommends a maximum allowable time of 90 seconds or less to receive calls and dispatch fire personnel. [Ref-03]
- F-08.** The National Fire Protection Association recommends a maximum allowable time of 60 seconds or less to don equipment and leave the station. [Ref-02]
- F-09.** The Harbor Area is served by Fire Station 2 located at 41 S. Seaward Avenue near Main Street, and is staffed by a single engine company and one unmanned reserve fire engine. This station is 3.48 miles from the most distant addresses in the Harbor Area. (Note: *MapQuest* lists a drive time of 6 minutes to these locations.)
- F-10.** Fire Station 2 received 2,255 calls for service in 2007, making it one of the busiest stations in the City. The Fire Master Plan establishes 3000 annual calls as an upper limit for efficient handling of fire emergency incidents.
- F-11.** According to VCFD management, emergency responses to the Harbor Area have been recorded as eight to eleven minutes. [Att-02]
- F-12.** In 2007, the VCFD responded to 572 calls for service in the Harbor Area.
- F-13.** VCFD Management states total response time goals are met on about 10% of calls for services into the Harbor Area.
- F-14.** In early 2007, the VCFD instituted a “roving” fire engine, staffed by three firefighter/paramedics, to address extended response times within the Harbor Area and the rest of the City. The roving engine also provides coverage during fire department training events.
- F-15.** The roving engine company is normally staffed Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and alternating Mondays and Fridays, 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. It is in the Harbor Area an average of 5% to 10% of the time.
- F-16.** According to VCFD Management the roving engine has improved citywide response times.

Ventura Harbor Patrol

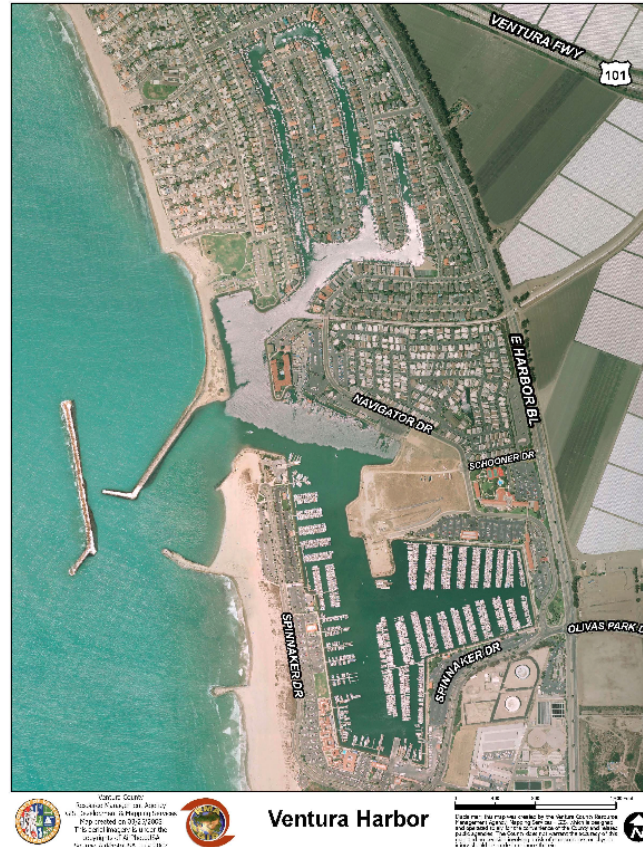
- F-17.** The Port District employs Harbor Patrol Officers (HPOs) whose primary duties are to enforce harbor ordinances and the State of California Boating and Waterways Code.
- F-18.** There are nine budgeted HPO positions, including the Harbor Master, with two to three officers on duty daily.
- F-19.** HPOs are on duty from 6:00 a.m. to 2:00 a.m.

- F-20.** There are no HPOs on duty from 2:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m. An HPO is “On-Call” during these hours. (Note: The Port District discontinued 24-hour coverage in 1991.)
- F-21.** HPO’s primary responsibility is for Port District-owned properties and occasional boat patrols of the Ventura Keys. If requested by another agency, they respond to ocean emergencies up to three miles outside the Harbor including the Ventura City Pier.
- F-22.** HPOs devote 20% to 40% of their time patrolling on water and the remainder to various land-based activities.
- F-23.** VCFD and HPOs are dispatched simultaneously to fire and medical aid calls for service on Port District properties and adjacent areas.
- F-24.** HPOs assist the VCFD from the Harbor Patrol Office and from land-based activities. When engaged in patrol duties on water, HPOs may not be able to respond in a timely manner and therefore may choose not to respond.
- F-25.** According to Port District management, HPO response times are estimated to be three to four minutes when dispatched while on land, eight to ten minutes when dispatched from water patrol, and ten to twenty-one minutes when called to respond after hours.
- F-26.** The Port District owns three patrol boats; one is equipped for firefighting.
- F-27.** HPOs are not certified California State Firefighters but assist the VCFD by transporting firefighters to emergencies on water and by providing waterside access to fires on land. (Note: VCFD and the Port District have a formalized Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) establishing cooperative use of the fire boat.)
- F-28.** HPOs are trained as Level-1 Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) and provide non-paramedic, first responder assistance to Port District-owned properties only.
- F-29.** According to VCFD records, HPOs assisted with 164 fire calls and medical aid in 2007.

Ventura Port District Development Plan

- F-30.** The Port District has plans to develop 23 acres of District-owned land within the Harbor.
- F-31.** The Port District selected a developer in May of 2000 to plan and develop this acreage.
- F-32.** In 2004, the City suggested a reworking of these initial development plans.
- F-33.** In the fall of 2006, the developer agreed to provide \$3.25 million for the construction of a fire station to serve the Harbor and adjacent areas as part of the Fire Master Plan. The \$3.25 million is contingent upon final approval of development plans.

- F-34.** The Port District and the City have agreed upon District-owned parcel 19-A as the probable location for future Fire Station 7.
- F-35.** Terms of an MOU are being negotiated between the City and the District as to how this parcel will be developed for use as a fire station.



City of Ventura

- F-36.** City management and the City Council have identified public safety as a top priority for all areas of the City.
- F-37.** A local sales tax over-ride for public safety titled, "Gang Prevention, 911 Emergency/Public Safety Improvement," (known as P-6) was intended to expand fire and police staffing. It did not receive the required 2/3 majority in the November 2006 election.
- F-38.** Public safety improvements in 2007 used greater than expected property tax revenues. City management projects a decrease in budgeted sales tax revenues of \$2.0 million as part of a projected \$4.0 million budget deficit for fiscal year 2008-2009.
- F-39.** In January of 2008, Ventura City Council adopted an ordinance for the recovery of costs associated with staffing the police 911 Emergency Call Center. City management stated that it intends to hire police and firefighters with the new revenue.

Conclusions

- C-01.** The VCFD bases the efficient delivery of fire services on a five-minute response time for 90% of calls for service. (F-01, F-04 through F-06, F-36)
- C-02.** The VCFD does not meet stated response time goals for calls for service in or adjacent to the Ventura Harbor because of the location of responding fire stations to the areas being served. (F-02, F-03, F-06 through F-13)
- C-03.** Residents of, and visitors to, the Harbor Area receive delayed fire services due to the time it takes to respond from the nearest fire station. This is not the case for most other areas of the City. Call volume, dispatch, and call reaction time may also contribute to extended response times. (F-05 through F-09, F-11, F-13) [Att-02]
- C-04.** VCFD Station 2, the closest station to the Harbor Area, is at 75% of its capacity for answering calls for service. Proposed developments in the Harbor Area will likely result in increased demand for fire services affecting all the areas served by Fire Station 2 and other stations. (F-01 through F-03, F-06, F-10, F-12, F-30 through F-35)
- C-05.** Emergency responses provided by the Harbor Patrol are limited by resources, staffing, and required level of training to fill an interim role in the delivery of medical services traditionally provided by the VCFD. (F-17 through F-29)
- C-06.** Revenue for building and staffing proposed Fire Station 7 on Port District property remains unresolved because of the City's current financial constraints. (F-33 through F-35, F-37 through F-39)

Recommendations

- R-01.** The City should follow the Fire Master Plan recommendation to build Fire Station 7. (C-01 through C-04, C-06)
- R-02.** The City should reallocate money in existing budgets or find alternate funding sources to build, equip and staff Fire Station 7 on Port District property. (C-01 through C-04, C-06)
- R-03.** The VCFD should expand the hours of the roving engine company and position it in the Harbor Area for a majority of the hours and extend coverage to the weekends. (C-01 through C-04)
- R-04.** The District should continue the use of HPOs to deliver EMT services in the Harbor Area until Fire Station 7 is built and staffed. (C-01 through C-05)
- R-05.** The District should reinstate Harbor Patrol staffing to a 24-hour seven days-a-week basis to enhance response times during those hours not covered by the City's roving engine. (C-01 through C-05)

- R-06.** The VCFD, with the Ventura County Fire Protection District, should review dispatch technology and policies to reduce total response times. (C-03)
- R-07.** The VCFD should review procedures and practices for ways to reduce the time needed for firefighters to don equipment and respond. (C-03)

Responses

Responses Required:

City Council, City of Ventura (R-01 through R-03, R-06, R-07)

Board of Port Commissioners, Ventura Port District (R-04, R-05)

References

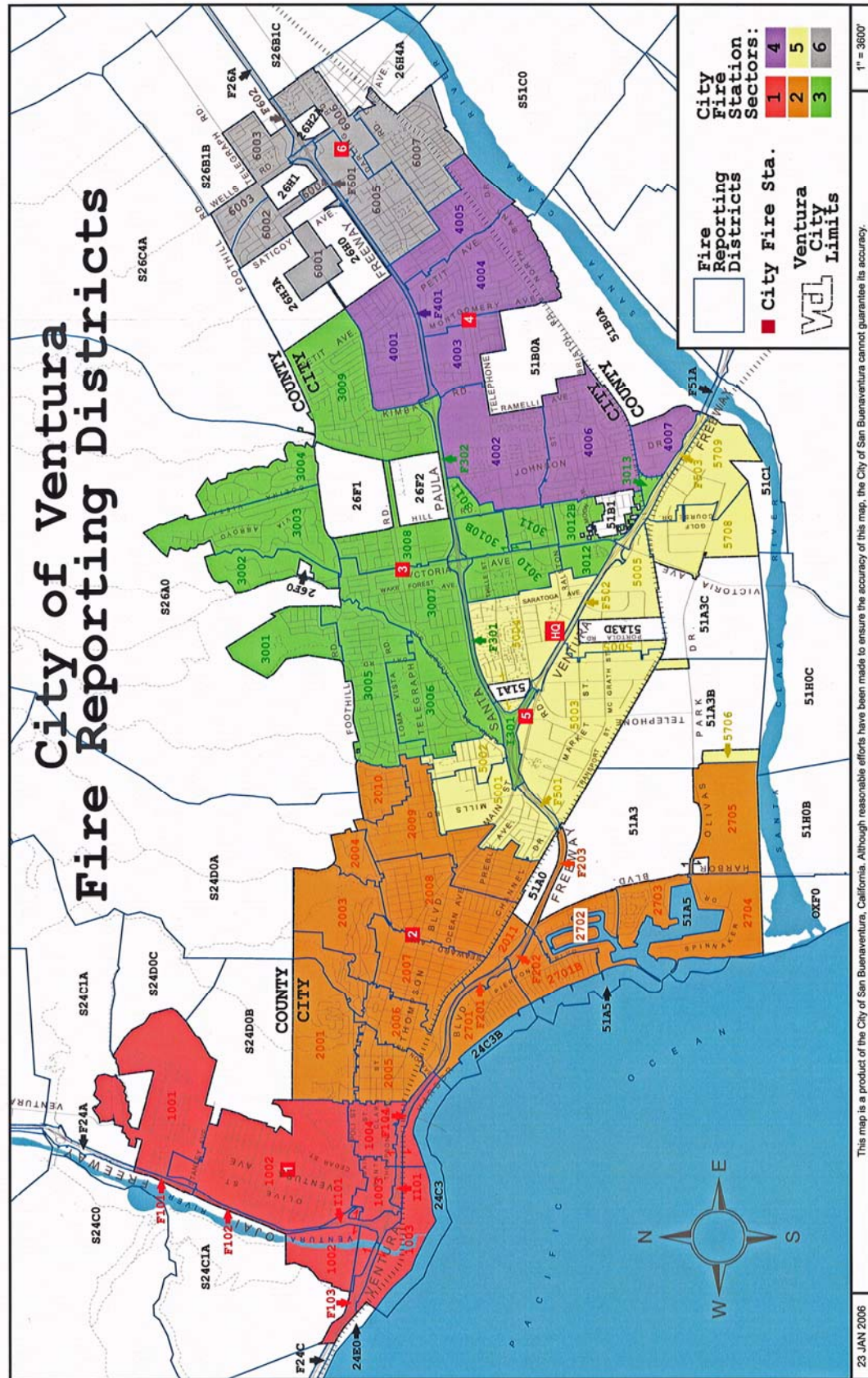
- Ref-01 Ventura City Fire Department Fire Facility and Equipment Master Plan
- Ref-02 National Fire Protection Association Standard 1710
- Ref-03 National Fire Protection Association Standard 1221

Attachments

- Att-01 Map VCFD Fire Reporting Districts
- Att-02 VCFD Response Times
- Att-03 Graph Call History, Population

Attachment-01
Ventura City Fire Department
Fire Reporting Districts

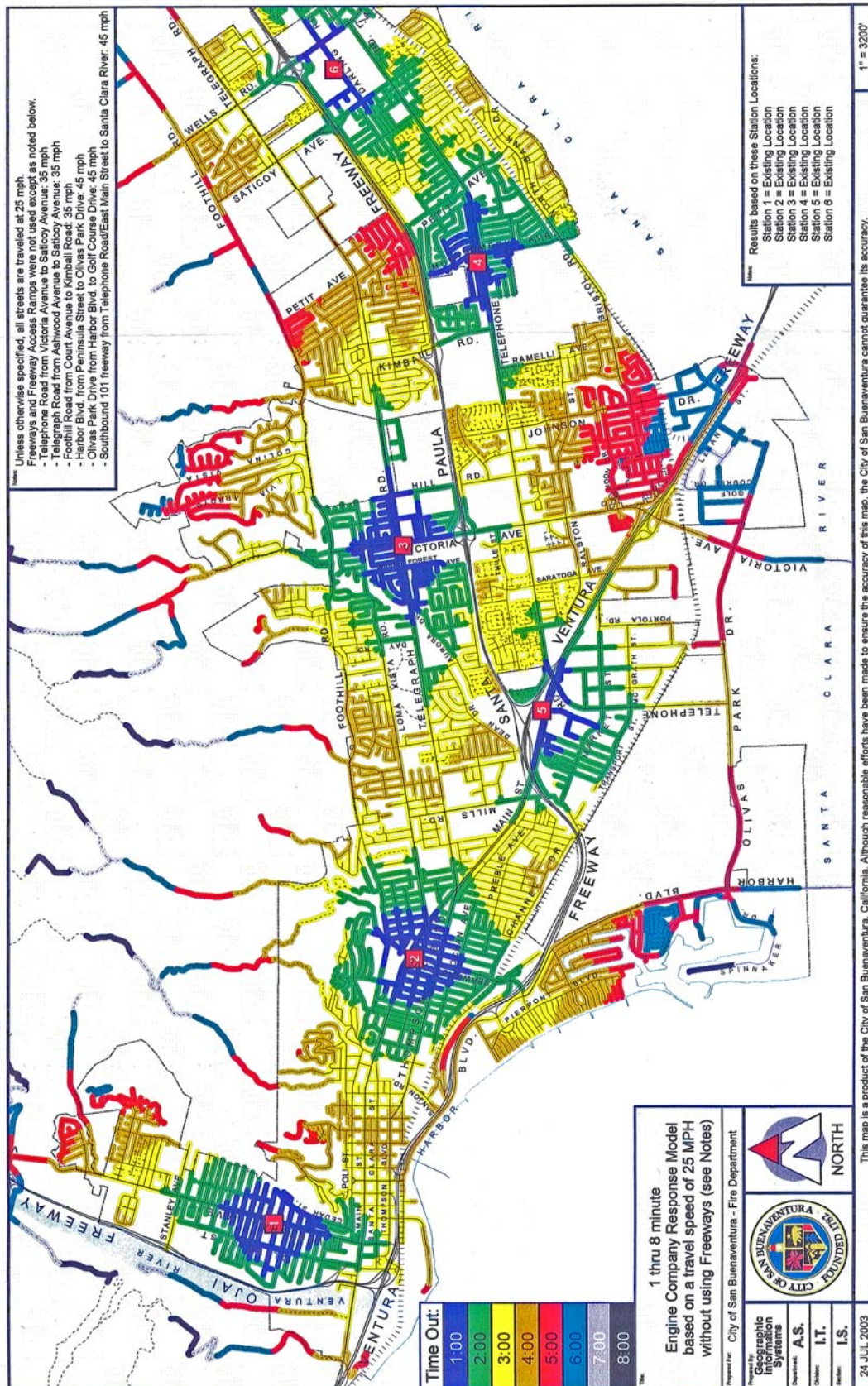
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Attachment-02
Ventura City Fire Department
Fire Response Times

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Attachment–03

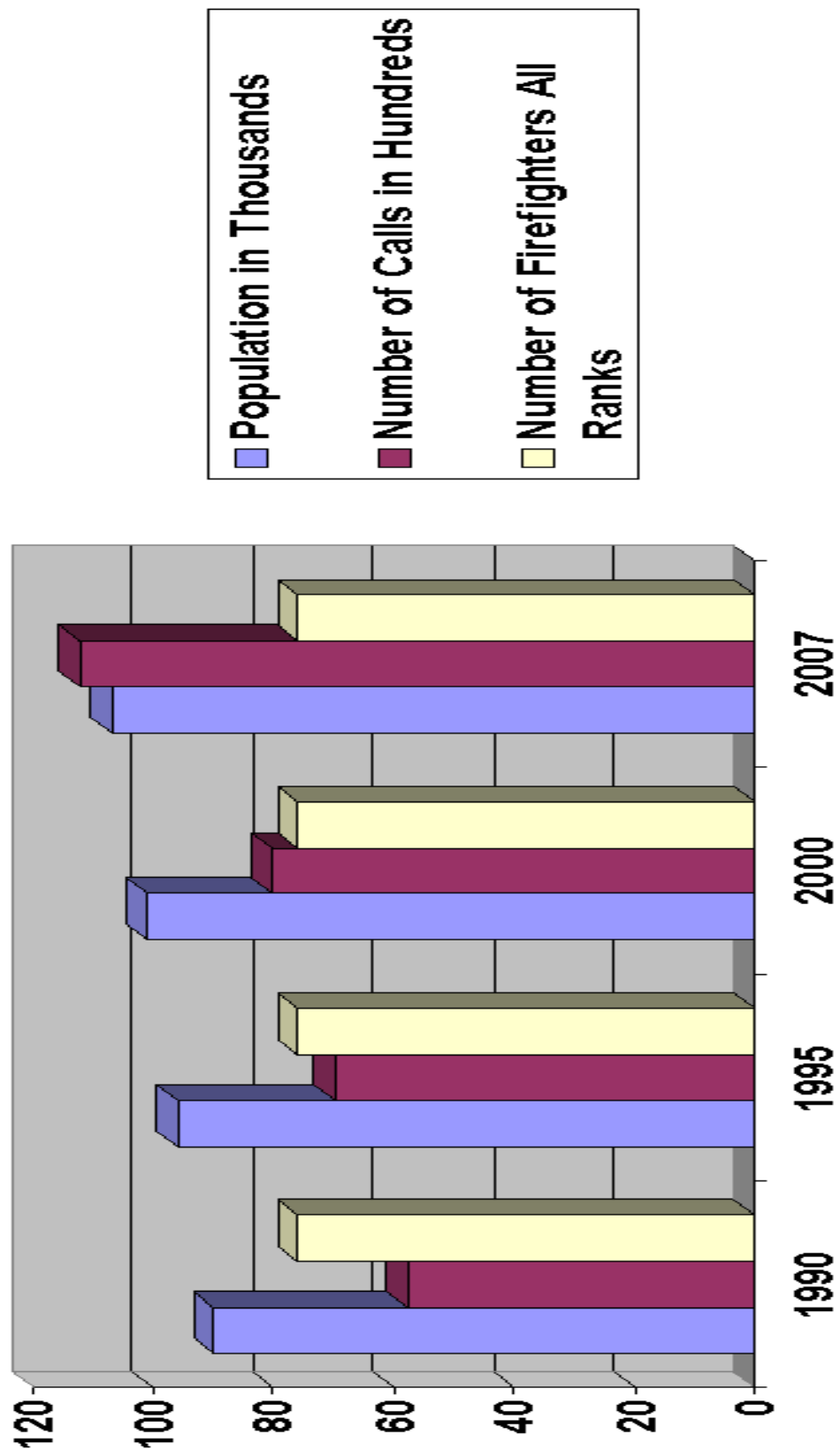
Chart

VCFD Total Calls

Ventura City Population

Number of Firefighters

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