

Response to Questions on the FY 2012 Budget

Request By: Supervisors Gross and McKay

Question: Please provide information on helicopters used by FCPD, including age of equipment, usage, replacement schedule etc. Also, how often does FCPD transport patients to hospitals by helicopter and is that activity billed to insurance companies. Where in the FY 2012 budget is the helicopter replacement item?

Response: The Police Department (FCPD) currently owns and operates two single-engine Bell 407 helicopters, currently over 14 and 10 years old, respectively. These helicopters are on an 8-year replacement cycle; however, replacement has been delayed due to steps taken by the Police Department to extend the life of both existing helicopters as well as various issues that have arisen in the procurement process. FCPD maintains a staff of 6 pilots and 11 tactical flight officers; working 12 hours shifts, 24 hours-per-day. In a typical year, FCPD responds to between 2000-3000 calls for service; such as flying severely injured crash victims to the hospital, helping locate missing children or dementia patients, and helping officers on the ground locate car-jacking, burglary, or robbery suspects in neighborhoods across Fairfax County.

Concerning patient transport, the large majority are medevac cases and only in very rare occasions for hospital transports. FCPD helicopters are defined as "Public Use" under FAA regulations; therefore, FCPD cannot bill insurance companies or charge for any patient transports. To charge for transports, FCPD would have to reclassify its operations and become what is referred to as "Part 135." The recurring internal cost associated with meeting the stringent 135 requirements would not be beneficial in comparison to the amount revenue generated; therefore, FCPD has elected to remain Public Use. The number of patient transports varies from year to year, but, as a point of comparison, there were 100 medevacs in calendar year 2010.

The replacement process for the current Bell 407 helicopters is well underway. The approved proposal is for Police to replace their two current single-engine helicopters with one dual engine Bell 429 helicopter in FY 2011 and a second dual engine Bell 429 in FY 2012. The new helicopters are a long-term investment that are expected to have a life cycle of 20 years at a net cost (after selling the existing helicopters and completion costs) of approximately \$5 million dollars each. It should be noted that FCPD began funding a *Helicopter Replacement Reserve* in Fund 503, Department of Vehicle Services (DVS) in 1995 and has invested a portion of their annual budget into this fund since that time. As a result, there will be no additional outlay of County funds for these aircraft.

The helicopters were purchased as part of a single order to take advantage of volume cost savings, with one helicopter recently delivered in March 2011 (which the Department aims to have in service by June 2011) and the other to arrive in FY 2012. It should be noted that an adjustment to the FY 2012 budget of Fund 503 will be required as part of the *FY 2011 Carryover Review* to accommodate the second part of this plan.

Aviation technology has changed considerably over the past decade and these new aircraft are safer, more reliable, faster and quieter than the existing helicopters. When it

comes to medevacs, fighting crime, and saving lives, every minute counts. These helicopters travel up to 172 miles-per-hour and will be able to get anywhere in Fairfax County in under 6.5 minutes (current helicopter time was 7.5 minutes). These helicopters are safer in that they've got built-in safety redundancies and back-up systems, for example, twin engines (old ones were single) and are IFR certified (able to fly in foggy/low visibility weather by instruments only). These new helicopters are also quieter as the re-designed rotor system results in a half the perceived noise level of the current noise level of the Bell 407s. Since 60 percent of helicopter operations occur during night-time hours, this was an important factor.