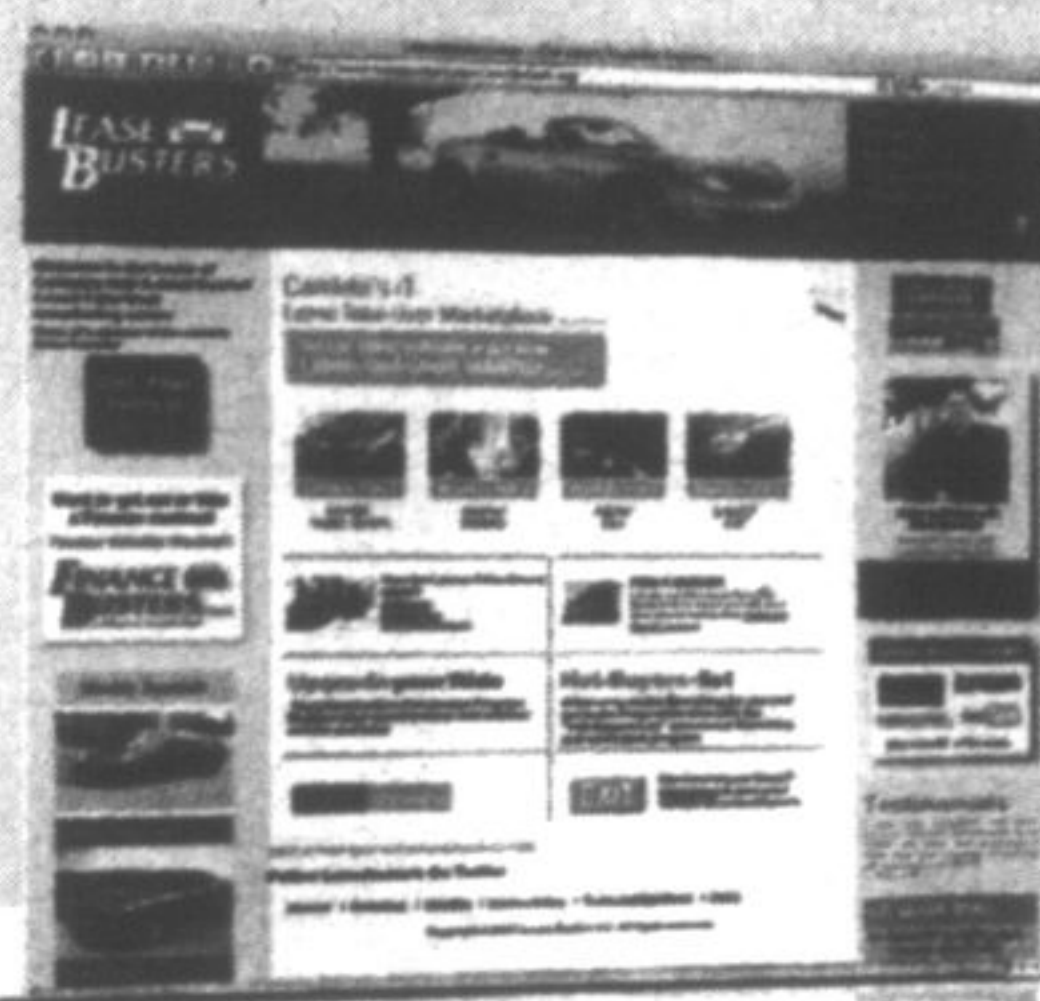


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Sharing paramedic dispatch could save \$350,000 a year

BY DAVID FLEISCHER
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York Region is trying to convince the province paramedics should be able to get to you faster and cost less to do so.

While the region is responsible for running its Emergency Medical Services department, when you call 911 and request an ambulance, it is dispatched from a call centre in Barrie.

The bottom line is this is an important part of the EMS system we cannot move forward with, or control as quickly as we'd like, community and health services commissioner Adelina Urbanski said.

York Region joined Peel, Durham, Halton and Simcoe County and commissioned consultants POMAX Public Safety to review how EMS dispatch works.

The final report makes five key recommendations, most notably that the five municipalities convince the province to allow them to operate a single GTA dispatch centre. It also calls on the province to step back and provide funding only.

The consultant's report highlighted a series of problems with the current system, including ambulances not being properly prioritized due to red tape and outdated systems and taxpayers paying more than they should.

The current system lacks integration with systems that would ensure greater accuracy, reduce call taking and dispatching time and effort, and improve safety, effectiveness and efficiency, the report states.

A convoluted system makes it difficult to

assess how frequently response times fail to meet legislated standards.

The system through which calls are prioritized is inefficient, meaning ambulances may rush to lower-priority calls that could wait, the report states.

But, people are not being endangered, Ms Urbanski said, noting residents seem reluctant to call 911, but shouldn't hesitate in an emergency.

Implementing best practices used in other areas would reduce the number of high-priority calls by 10 per cent and perhaps twice as much, the report found.

That could translate into a savings of nearly \$350,000 in York Region.

PROVINCIAL APPROVAL NEEDED

In total, the efficiencies suggested would save \$3.3 million for the five municipalities if the province allows them go through.

The authors reviewed several models and concluded a single facility, shared by the five municipalities, would be best. It would cost \$114 million to operate for 10 years. On the other hand, co-ordinating local services would cost more than twice as much.

The report validated a shared belief things could be done better, Ms Urbanski said.

Ambulance dispatch is handled primarily by 16 provincially run central ambulance communication centres (CACC).

Toronto, Ottawa, Timmins and Niagara operate their own local ambulance communication services (ACS) in Ontario.

— With files from Torstar News Service

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