

Emergency Services Response Times

The Emergency Services Response Times report is a component of the Brice Prairie Capacity Analysis Report, which considers development capacity based on environmental, transportation and emergency service limitations on the Prairie. This analysis describes emergency response times and begins to assess them in relation to additional development on the Prairie.

FIRE PROTECTION & EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES

All of La Crosse County is served by 911 emergency dispatch. The Village of Holmen Fire Department serves Brice Prairie for fire protection and EMS. The City of Onalaska Fire Department previously served the Prairie; however, due to longer response times, the City of Onalaska Fire Department has agreed to allow the Holmen Fire Department to cover the area.

The Holmen Fire Department has three full-time employees and 32 paid on-call volunteer firefighters. The department currently has a fire insurance rating of 4. (A rating of 10 means the community has no insurance and a rating of 1 is the best a community can achieve.) The Fire Department is located at 710 South Main St in Holmen, and emergency equipment enters the Prairie via either CTH ZN or CTH Z depending on the location of the call.

The figure titled “EMS (Only) Estimated Response Times”, created by the City of Onalaska, shows the response times for the Holmen Fire Department (shown in green) and the Onalaska Fire Department (shown in red). The shaded areas show estimated fire response times of up to 8 minutes, with each minute increment noted. The figure demonstrates the slower response of the Onalaska Area Fire Department.

Brice Prairie also has its own EMS – the Brice Prairie First Responders. They have a building located at W7886 CTH ZN, where they house a first responder vehicle. The First Responders is comprised of 3-5 volunteers that have EMS training but no fire training. The First Responders do not currently have the capability to operate equipment for water emergencies. Therefore, the Holmen Fire Department responds to all fire calls and all water-related emergency calls on the Prairie. The Holmen Fire Department provides EMS services to Brice Prairie calls approximately 3-4 times a year when the First Responders volunteers are not available. The Town of Onalaska reimburses both the Holmen Fire Department and the Brice Prairie First Responders on a per-call basis.

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) has established standards for responding to fire emergencies for full-time and volunteer departments. While communities routinely adopt NFPA standards for electrical codes and other safety measures, few have adopted the response-time standard. For fire stations where the firefighters are full-time paid employees, the NFPA sets a 6-minute standard for 90 percent of calls. The response time standard for volunteer departments are much longer, as most volunteer fire fighters have separate day jobs. In an urban or urbanizing area like Brice Prairie (1,000 or more people per square mile), the department should dispatch a transport capable unit within 9 minutes for 90 percent of calls. There are more relaxed standards for suburban and rural areas.

As fully analyzed in the Transportation Capacity Analysis Report, the Prairie is cut-off from the Holmen Fire Department by the at-grade rail crossings on both CTH Z and CTH ZN. Train-related delays can average 3 to 5 minutes for each of the 50 trains that pass through the Prairie on an average day. In emergency response, minutes count and can result in lost lives and significantly more property damage.

In response, the 20-year plan for the Holmen Fire Department includes staffing and equipping the Brice Prairie First Responders building with a water pumper and an EMS vehicle. The Prairie station is scheduled for the second 10-year planning horizon.

Recommendation – Include the Holmen Fire Department as a reviewing agency for development and redevelopment plans in the Town.

Recommendation – Coordinate with the Holmen Fire Department on the planned staff and equipment for Brice Prairie in relation to current and projected needs. Determine fiscal impacts of residential and non-residential development on the Prairie.

Recommendation – Support the volunteers of the Brice Prairie First Responders and ensure continued EMS training.

POLICE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

The La Crosse County Sheriff's Department serves Brice Prairie. The La Crosse County Sheriff's Department, which is located at 333 Vine Street in the City of La Crosse, has 109 employees with 19 patrol deputies. The City of Onalaska Police Department and Village of Holmen Police Department do not serve Brice Prairie but do provide backup when requested by the Sheriff's Department.

Response time is the amount of lapsed time in minutes between when a call is received and when the first officer arrives on the scene. It is perhaps one of the measures most noticed by the average citizen. The figure titled "Law Enforcement (Estimated) Response Times," created by the City of Onalaska, shows a survey of emergency response times on the Prairie in 2005. The figure shows actual Sheriff's Department response times and likely Onalaska Police Department response times. In 2005, the Sheriff's Department's response times varied widely between 4 and 12 minutes, depending on the location of patrol police officers at the time that the call is received.

Many argue that response times should not form the standard for police capacity and level of service. There is no question that a quick response time is critical when a crime in progress has been reported. However, the emphasis on response time may come at the expense of time that would be better spent on crime prevention. A more accurate capacity measure could be to match the appropriate response to the type of service call. Some calls demand an immediate mobile response, while others may be less pressing or may even be handled by a civilian employee over the phone.

The Onalaska Joint Cooperative Commission is considering a metropolitan police force. The combined police department could serve La Crosse, Onalaska, West Salem and Holmen. The measure could eliminate duplication and save resources. At this point, it is unknown the proposal's possible impact on the Sheriff's Department and law enforcement services on Brice Prairie.

Recommendation – Include the La Crosse County Sheriff's Department as a reviewing agency for development and redevelopment plans in the Town.

Recommendation – The Town should continue to participate in Onalaska Joint Cooperative Commission meetings to ensure future adequate police capacity and level of service for the Town and the Prairie.

CONCLUSION

The emergency service response times are currently within national standards for EMS and fire protection and are reasonable for police protection. Limited transportation entry points to Brice Prairie will limit emergency response times. Should residential, commercial and industrial development on the Prairie continue, emergency service providers will need to construct and staff fire/EMS and perhaps police stations on the Prairie.

Recommendation – The Town should continue to assess the response level for fire, emergency medical and police services, and communicate concerns to service providers.

Sources:

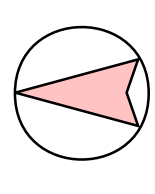
- Interview with Doug Schober, Holmen Fire Chief, January 17, 2006. Information calls with Onalaska Police Department and La Crosse Sheriff's Department, January 17, 2006.
- Dedman, Bill, "Slower arrival at fires in US is costing lives", Boston Globe, January 30, 2005
- Fitch, Jay, "Response Times: Myths, Measurement & Management", Journal of Emergency Medical Services, September 2005.

Attachments:

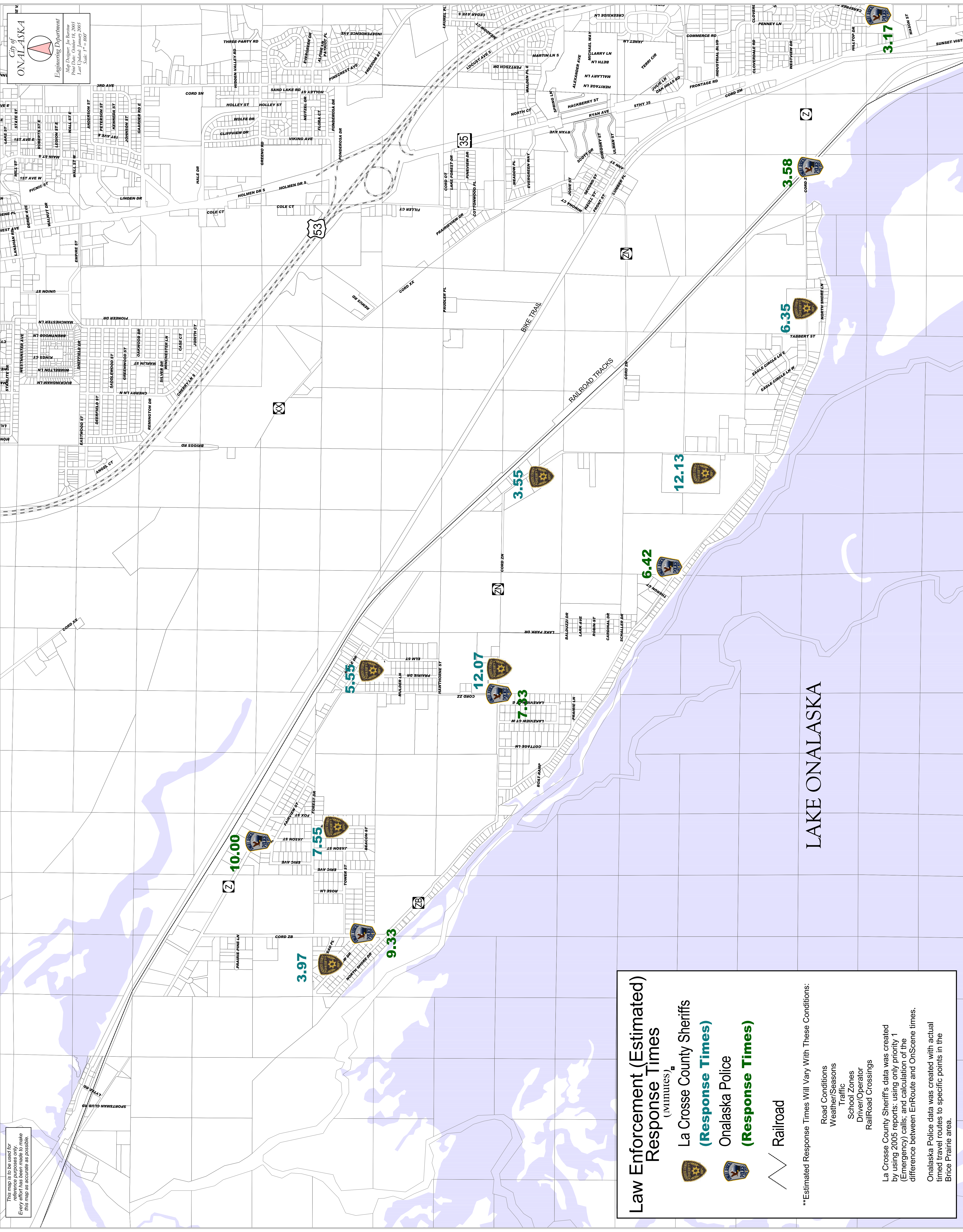
- EMS (Only) Estimated Response Times, provided by City of Onalaska, October 18, 2005.
- Law Enforcement (Estimated) Response Times, provided by the City of Onalaska, October 18, 2005.

This map is to be used for reference purposes only. Every effort has been made to make this map as accurate as possible.

City of
ONALASKA



Engineering Department
Map Design: Jo Rasmussen
Print Date: October 18, 2005
Last Update: January 2005
Scale: 1" = 800'



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