CTAS Report Summary

Executive summary

The report recommends that Williamson County pursue **Option 2: establish a County Fire Department while continuing to use the three nonprofit fire departments through performance-based contracts and automatic-aid agreements**.

This would be a transitional hybrid system:

- A County Fire Chief would command County personnel and County response areas.
- The three nonprofits would retain their boards, chiefs, members and assigned territories.
- All providers would operate under one countywide incident-command framework.
- The nonprofits would be held to written performance, staffing, training, reporting and safety requirements.
- After **24–36 months of audited results**, the Commission would decide whether to retain the hybrid model or move toward a unified County department.

The report does **not** recommend immediately transferring the system entirely to the nonprofits or immediately creating a fully consolidated County fire department.

Why the present system is a concern

The current arrangement is described as organizationally blurred:

- The County apparently owns most stations, apparatus and major equipment.
- The County supplies substantial funding.
- Approximately **12 County employees assigned through EMA or Public Safety** regularly support routine fire operations.
- The three nonprofit organizations nevertheless remain the formal fire departments.
- Command, supervision, insurance, safety, asset maintenance and accountability are not all located within one clearly defined organization.
- Residents may reasonably believe they are receiving service from a County fire department, even though private nonprofit boards formally operate the departments.

The study says EMA was intended principally for emergency-management coordination, logistics and disaster support—not to function as the routine operating fire department. Increasing calls and decreasing volunteer availability have drawn EMA personnel further into day-to-day fire response.

The three options

Option	Description	Report's conclusion
1. Independent nonprofits	Transfer or lease assets and operational responsibility to the three nonprofits; remove County personnel from routine support	Not recommended now
2. County department plus nonprofit contracts	Establish a limited County Fire Department and contract with the nonprofits for the remaining areas	**Recommended next step**
3. Unified County Fire Department	County assumes the entire fire service, incorporating qualified volunteers into one department	Possible long-term outcome, but should be phased

Option 1: Independent nonprofit departments

This would establish the clearest separation between County government and the nonprofits, but the report questions whether the nonprofits could independently:

- Staff their territories without EMA personnel.
- Maintain and replace millions of dollars in County-owned assets.
- Pay for insurance, facilities, equipment and administrative systems.
- Maintain reliable daytime response.
- Manage audits, records, cybersecurity and succession.

The report warns that transferring expensive assets does not give a nonprofit the income or organizational capacity necessary to maintain them. A nonprofit failure could force the County into an emergency takeover.

Option 2: County department with nonprofit contracts

The County would create a fire department with an initial, data-selected response area. The nonprofits would continue operating elsewhere under contracts lasting approximately one to three years.

Those contracts would establish:

- Minimum staffing and qualifications.
- Response-time and unit-availability standards.
- Training, medical, fitness and background-check requirements.
- Driver qualifications and apparatus-use rules.
- Financial reporting and audit rights.
- Insurance requirements.
- Separate reporting of nonprofit, County, EMA and municipal resources.
- Corrective-action, payment, step-in and termination provisions.
- Automatic-aid and closest-unit response requirements.

This option preserves volunteer resources while giving the County stronger control, accountability and measurable information.

Its primary risk is that the County could end up **paying for two systems**—a growing County department and continued nonprofit funding—without resolving command or eliminating duplication.

Option 3: Unified County Fire Department

This provides the clearest long-term accountability:

- One chief.
- One budget.
- One chain of command.
- One set of operating, training, personnel and safety policies.
- Countywide deployment based on need instead of legacy boundaries.

However, it would produce the greatest recurring cost and personnel burden. The County would assume responsibility for salaries, benefits, overtime, leave coverage, human resources, station maintenance, fleet replacement and administrative operations.

A rapid consolidation could also cause volunteers to leave before sufficient career personnel are hired. The report recommends converting one station or territory at a time if the County eventually chooses this option.

Most important limitation: many facts remain unverified

The report repeatedly cautions that its conclusions rely on information that must still be confirmed. Among the items requiring verification are:

- Exactly which stations, vehicles and equipment the County owns.
- The actual number and duties of County employees supporting fire operations.
- Who directs, schedules and evaluates those employees.
- Who appoints, removes or supervises each fire chief.
- Who maintains and authorizes drivers of County vehicles.
- Which insurance and injury coverage applies to every responder.
- Each nonprofit's true stand-alone staffing and response capability.
- Complete ISO/Public Protection Classification documentation.
- The total County and nonprofit cost of the existing system.

This is important: **the report recommends Option 2, but it does not claim that the factual and financial due diligence is complete.**

Staffing and response data problem

Current reporting combines resources from:

- Nonprofit departments.

- County/EMA personnel.
- Municipal departments.
- EMS.
- Automatic-aid partners.

Consequently, the data cannot reliably show how each nonprofit would perform independently.

Before choosing the County department's first response area, the report calls for at least three years of data showing:

- Calls by hour, day, type and location.
- Unit turnout and travel times.
- Number and qualifications of arriving personnel.
- Simultaneous calls and resulting coverage gaps.
- Volunteer versus staffed-unit response.
- Reliance on EMA and municipal aid.
- Station and apparatus condition.
- Growth, development and special hazards.

The initial County response territory should be selected from those verified results—not convenience or political considerations.

Financial issues

The report contains **no actual cost estimate** for any option. Instead, it calls for a ten-year operating and capital forecast covering:

- Salaries, benefits, overtime and leave coverage.
- County payments to nonprofits.
- Stations, utilities, repairs and renovations.
- Apparatus acquisition, maintenance and replacement.
- Insurance.
- PPE, SCBA, radios and technology.
- Dispatch and communications.
- Training, medical examinations and background checks.
- Human resources, accounting, audits and cybersecurity.
- Deferred maintenance and capital needs.

The report warns that costs now carried in EMA, Fleet, Risk Management, Communications or other departmental budgets must be included. Otherwise, the present nonprofit model will appear artificially inexpensive.

It recommends stress-testing the plan for:

- A 10% increase in personnel costs.
- Higher overtime and vacancies.

- Failure of a major apparatus.
- Lower-than-expected volunteer retention.

Finance should certify that each expansion phase can be sustained for five years before permanent employees are added or another station is converted.

Highest identified risks

The report classifies several current conditions as critical or very high risk:

- Unclear responsibility for providing the service.
- Competing or unclear incident command.
- Inadequate staffing or effective response force.
- Mismatch between vehicle operators and insurance coverage.
- Poor station or apparatus condition.
- Safety or respiratory-protection failures.
- County and nonprofit personnel responsibilities overlapping.
- County department costs exceeding projections.
- Volunteer attrition during restructuring.
- Service interruption during transition.
- Failure to act while the existing ambiguities remain.

The report is careful to say these are **preliminary planning assessments**, not findings that an accident, insurance deficiency or legal violation has occurred.

Recommended timetable

First 90 days

- Pause material asset transfers.
- Inventory deeds, titles, vehicles, equipment, agreements and restrictions.
- Verify personnel duties, supervision and insurance coverage.
- Adopt an interim command-and-supervision memorandum.
- Build a common data system that separately identifies every responding organization.
- Obtain complete ISO rating documentation.

Three to nine months

- Determine the organizational and funding structure.
- Establish the County department and fire-chief position.
- Select the initial response area using verified data.
- Negotiate performance contracts with each nonprofit.
- Adopt common command, training, reporting and safety standards.
- Conduct volunteer and stakeholder meetings.

Nine to 24 months

- Begin County service in the selected area.
- Execute nonprofit service and asset-use agreements.
- Publish quarterly performance reports.
- Evaluate expansion using objective benchmarks.

Twenty-four to 60 months

- Decide whether to retain the hybrid system or move toward full County consolidation.
- Complete any property, personnel and organizational transitions.

The report makes a reasonable case that the current system has outgrown its informal structure and that responsibility, command and accountability need to be clarified. It supports **Option 2 as a controlled transitional model**, not necessarily as the permanent answer.

However, the recommendation is still conditional. The report does not provide verified department-level performance, a complete asset inventory, a final staffing plan, actual cost projections or a validated funding mechanism. Those matters should be completed before the Commission authorizes permanent staffing, transfers assets or commits to a particular long-term system.