

“3-1-1 - putting city government at your fingertips”  
Mayor Lee P. Brown

## “NEIGHBORHOOD ORIENTED GOVERNMENT”



### 3-1-1 HOUSTON SERVICE HELPLINE

#### Mission

With every call, we assure easy access to municipal government  
and deliver excellent customer service to  
our citizens

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

TRANSMITTAL LETTER	1
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
3-1-1 PERFORMANCE STATISTICS	3
NATIONAL PEER RECOGNITION	8



# CITY of HOUSTON

Post Office Box 1562 Houston, Texas 77251 713-837-0311  
OFFICE of the MAYOR  
Public Safety and Drug Policy  
**3-1-1 Houston Service Helpline**

Fiscal Year 2003 presented some major challenges for the staff of the 3-1-1 Houston Service Helpline. However, in overall performance the 3-1-1 Team proved to be up-to-the test and demonstrated total commitment to the goals of emphasizing neighborhood oriented government, improving customer service and streamlining services provided by city departments, as well as reducing the numbers of routine calls to 9-1-1 and police.

As in many areas of the City, the 3-1-1 Helpline was understaffed throughout most of the fiscal year and our call volume escalated. By June 30, 2003, we received over 2.1 million calls and E-mails. Although statistics show that only 84 percent of these contacts were responded to, it is important to note that in addition to understaffing, the call center made a number of changes in our call answering procedures. While the numbers would appear to be adverse, the changes, in actuality enhanced our customer services to the general public as well as our departmental customers.

Early in the year, the departments requested that our call staff search the database of an entire area surrounding the location being reported before creating certain types of service requests. This additional function, although a credible request, increased the average time of processing a call. Although the added time was only seconds per call, the end results increased the average speed of answer, average times to process a call, and increased abandoned calls. The overall benefits of the new function were as follows:

- Many callers reported problems that stemmed from existing problems, or effected areas relatively near the source of the problem. Often crews are working on the source problem and when discovered by the call-taker search, this allowed 3-1-1 to give an immediate explanation for the problem and advise that the department was working to resolve the issue.
- Secondly, by 3-1-1 taking the additional time to provide the research many duplicated service requests were eliminated allowing departments to process CSR generated requests with greater efficiency.

The management team of the 3-1-1 Houston Service Helpline is dedicated to providing excellent customer service to benefit all associates. During FY04, the call center will further expand services by integrating additional departments into the 3-1-1 Customer Request System.

Gloria L. Bingham  
Director

## **3-1-1 Houston Service Helpline - Houston's key to city services**

The 3-1-1 Houston Service Helpline is a service-driven call center that provides the residents and neighbors of Houston with easy access to all city services. Our primary goal is to provide a single point for customers to contact the City of Houston for a wide variety of needs: service requests, trouble reports, answers to frequently asked questions and to act as a bridge to department operations. We accomplish this goal by accepting all advantageous changes in our operations, continuous training for our call-taking staff and frequent communications between the departments and our 3-1-1 Liaisons.

The 3-1-1 Houston Service Helpline is always available to assist our customers with not only routine inquiries, but for special situations. We become the front-line spokespersons for “the situation of the moment” such as West Nile Virus alert or Back-to-School Immunizations (Health Department), Heat Emergencies (City Emergency Management), or the thousands of inquiries sparked by an announcement of a Municipal Courts Amnesty period.

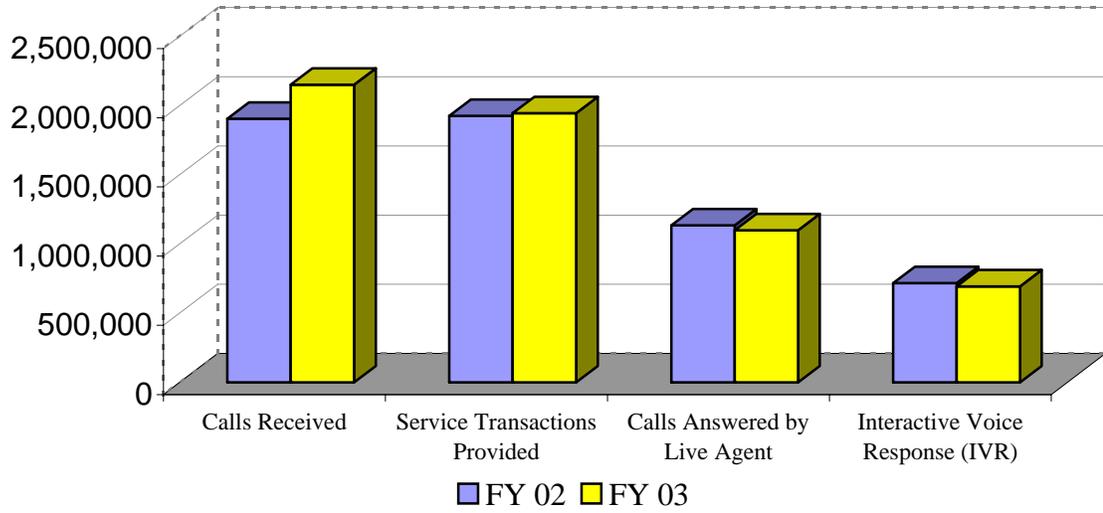
### **FY 03 STAFFING LEVELS**

Assistant Director	1	3-1-1 Telecommunicator Supervisors	7
Division Manager	1	Customer Service Representative	1
Management Analyst IV	1	Customer Service Representatives III	2
Administrative Manager	1	3-1-1 Senior Telecommunicators	11
3-1-1 Liaisons	2	3-1-1 Telecommunicators	47
Administrative Assistant	1	3-1-1 Senior Trainer	1

### 3-1-1 HOUSTON SERVICE HELPLINE FY03 PERFORMANCE STATISTICS

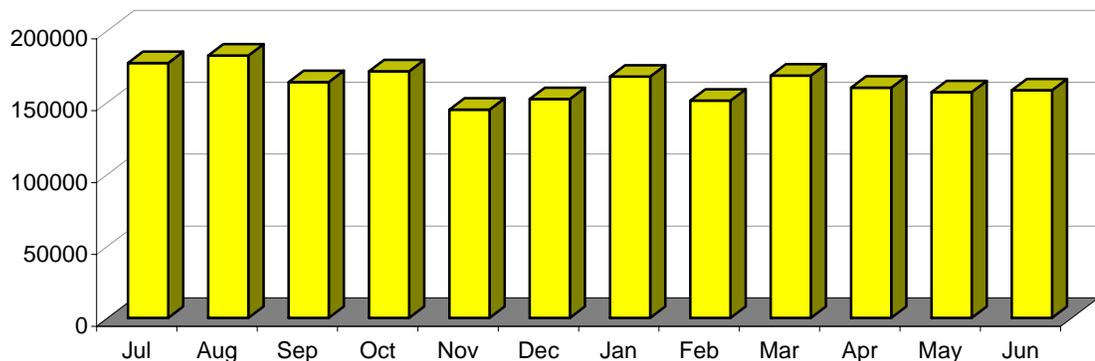
The 3-1-1 Houston Service Helpline performed 1,944,106 service transactions in FY 03, slightly higher than in FY02.

#### 3-1-1 HOUSTON SERVICE HELPLINE TOTAL TRANSACTION VOLUME



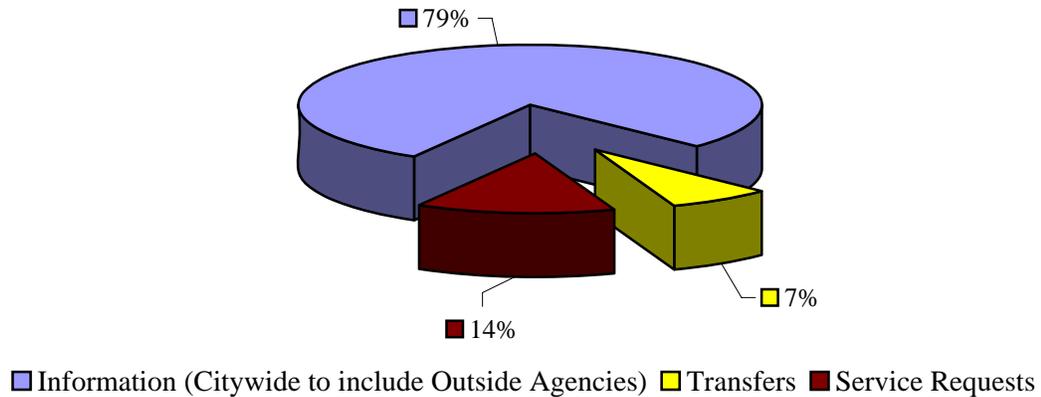
The spikes in July and August, below, were due to increased calls for Police, Harris County (West Nile Virus), Planning & Development – NPD (requests to cut high weeds), and Public Works & Engineering (water main breaks). Municipal Courts mailed out delinquent case notices in October & January and promoted the Amnesty program in March, which influenced the call volume for those months.

#### FY03 TOTAL MONTHLY TRANSACTIONS PROVIDED



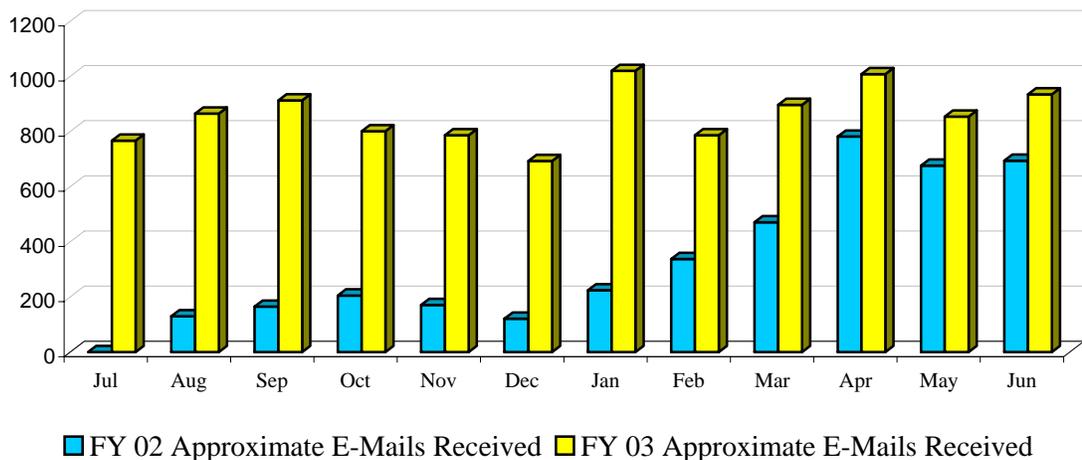
The graph below reflects the disposition of all requests processed by the 3-1-1 Houston Service Helpline: In FY 03, 79 percent were for general information (i.e. Municipal Courts inquiries, status checks for water, sewer, garbage/heavy trash, traffic maintenance and outside agencies). Service Requests created using the CSR application constituted 14 percent, while 7 percent of the calls were transferred to the appropriate person / department for services not provided by 3-1-1, or referred to an external agency. Informational calls were slightly lower in FY 02 (75 percent).

### FY03 HOUSTON SERVICE HELPLINE ANNUAL CALL DISPOSITION



In FY 03 the 3-1-1 Houston Service Helpline received approximately 10,327 electronic requests. Approximately 36 percent of the request resulted in CSR generated service requests. As with requests received via telephone, the larger portion of our electronic services are satisfied by providing information. Our E-mail contacts are expected to escalate to even higher volumes in FY 04 as our customers, the general public as well as departmental staff become acquainted with the ease of this service. Departments are finding that the e-mail requests simplify their perception of the problem because the facts as submitted by the customer are copied to the description field of the CSR generated service request.

### 3-1-1 Requests Received Via Electronic Mail FY 02 Vs. FY 03



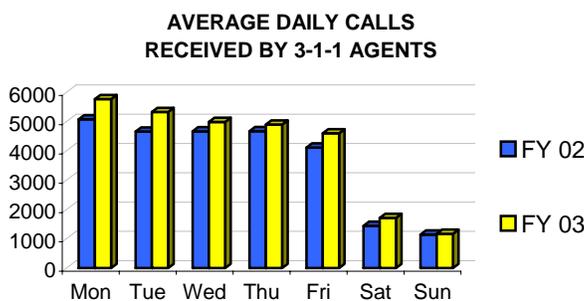
## 3-1-1 Houston Service Helpline Telecommunicators

### Performance Comparison

	FY 02	FY 03
<b>Total transactions provided</b>	1,920,094	1,944,106
<b>Percentage of calls answered</b>	96.7	84.0
<b>Percentage of calls abandoned</b>	3.3	16.0
<b>Average speed of answer</b>	6 seconds	66 seconds
<b>Average time to abandoned</b>	21 seconds	68 seconds
<b>Average time to create a service request</b>	4.09 minutes	4.09 minutes
<b>Average time to process information call</b>	1.49 minutes	2.01 minutes
<b>Average time to process a transfer</b>	1.20 minutes	1.33 minutes
<b>Overall average time to process a call</b>	2.06 minutes	2.17 minutes

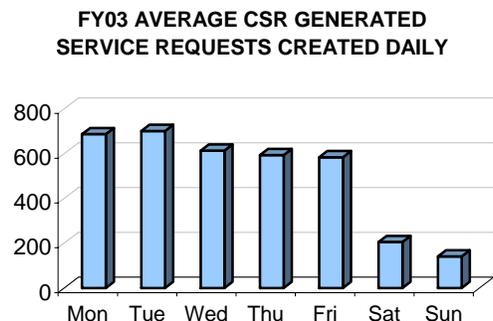
In FY03, 2,149,887 calls entered the 3-1-1 Houston Service Helpline. However due to understaffing through the year and additional procedures requested by the departments of our call taking staff, the call center was able to answer only 84 percent of all calls. In addition to the increase in the average speed of answer, the understaffing issue resulted in 12.7 percent fewer calls answered and 12.7 percent increase in the abandoned calls compared to FY02. The 3-1-1 Houston Service Helpline Telecommunicators answered 1,097,308 calls compared to 1,133,355 in FY02.

Over 1.9 million customer request for services were processed during this fiscal year, a slight increase compared to FY02. In FY03, call staff averaged 12 seconds longer to process a call compared to FY02. The increase was a direct result of agents recording notes before completing requests and searching the system for duplicates before creating new service requests as requested by departments.



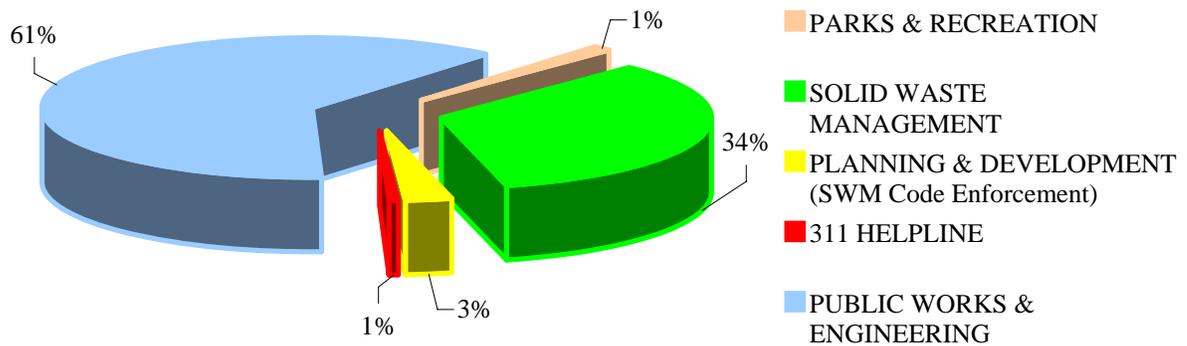
The graph to the left reflects the average daily calls distributed to 3-1-1 Telecommunicators in FY 03. The top producing 3-1-1 Telecommunicator processed 32,274 of the total transactions for 2003 fiscal year.

The graph to the right reflects the average daily Service Requests created by 3-1-1 Telecommunicators, in FY 03. Tuesdays averaged slightly higher in volume with an average of 701 service requests created using the CSR application.



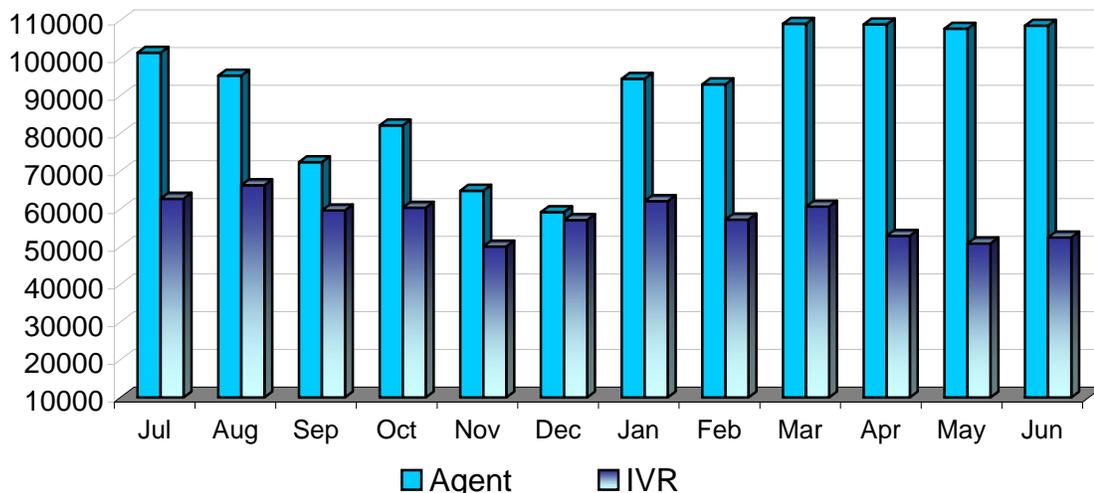
Most of all CSR generated service requests are created by 3-1-1 Telecommunicators. The graph below clearly indicates that Public Works and Engineering and Solid Waste Management receive the most CSR generated requests. Planning and Development is now online since the responsibilities of the Solid Waste Management Code Enforcement were shifted to this department and consolidated with the Neighborhood Protection Division. Solid Waste Code Enforcement is the only service request that 3-1-1 produces for Neighborhood Protection in the CSR Application. The 3-1-1 Helpline service requests are tracking devices for customer comments directed to the Mayor and for hazardous spills within the corporate limits of Houston.

**FY 03 CSR SYSTEM GENERATED SERVICE REQUESTS  
CREATED PER DEPARTMENT**



The graph below reflects 1,097,308 (or 61%) of service contacts were greeted by 3-1-1 Telecommunicators versus 692,416 (or 39%) were greeted via the Municipal Courts Interactive Voice Response System (IVR).

**FY03 LIVE AGENT vs IVR**

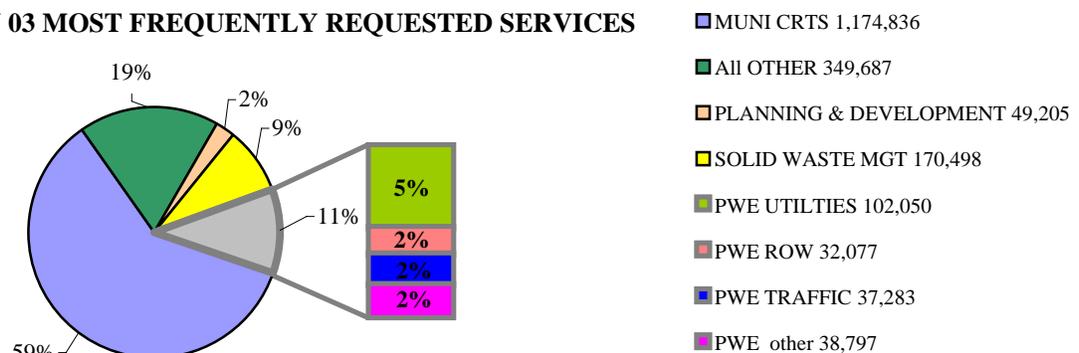


The table below provides a contrast in the total number of transactions processed via the 3-1-1 Houston Service Helpline in FY03 above our debut year in FY02. Municipal Courts related requests remain the greater volume with approximately a 2% increase in FY03 (1,174,765) over 1,090,257 in FY02. Public Works & Engineering requests were approximately 1% less than in FY02. However, Neighborhood Protection was moved under the direction of Planning and Development in FY 03. Solid Waste Management increased in call volume even though their Code Enforcement Group was also shifted to the Planning and Development Department in FY 03. The increase for this department is primarily due to public response to the changes in the Add-A-Can program. . Police and Fire related calls increased by over 2,000 (Police) requests and 676 (Fire) in our second year of operation.

Department	FY 02	FY 03	Department	FY 02	FY 03
Affirmative Action	827	974	Aviation	865	582
Building Services	1,736	866	City Council	4,624	4,235
City Secretary	4,266	2,428	Convention & Entertainment	1,385	1,115
Controller’s Office	860	590	Fire Department	3,639	4,315
Finance & Administration	41,677	10,824	Health & Human Services	11,757	20,671
Housing & Community Development	3,589	2,745	Human Resources	10,140	8,772
Information Technology	N/A	119	Legal Department	2,394	2,103
Library	1,557	3,377	Municipal Courts—Admin.	374,057	482,349
Municipal Courts—Judicial	3,897	71	Parks & Recreation	5,458	6,660
Planning & Development (NPD and SWM Code Enforcement in FY 03)	16,882	49,205	Police Department	45,841	48,230
Mayor’s Office	8,261	5,097	Public Works & Engineering	276,756	210,207
Solid Waste Management	162,878	170,498	Interactive Voice Response (IVR)	716,200	692,416
All Other	224,525	225,984			

As shown below almost 60 percent of the services provided by 3-1-1 are dedicated to Municipal Courts inquiries concerning warrants, rescheduling court dates, traffic ticket fees, and other court inquiries.

**FY 03 MOST FREQUENTLY REQUESTED SERVICES**



## NATIONAL PEER RECOGNITION

Since our opening ceremony, the 3-1-1 Houston Service Helpline has sparked the interest of other cities considering implementing a 3-1-1 service. We are serving as the model for municipal government non-emergency call-taking services. Our call center has been visited by more than 15 United States cities and from other countries as near as Canada and as far away as Japan. We are frequently contacted via telephone or e-mail for information by individuals who have not visited our facility but have heard of it.

Our call center has been honorably recognized in publications such as the COPS Innovations, Promising Strategies from the Field produced by the U. S. Department of Justice and we have been asked to participate in numerous conferences throughout the United States to speak about our operations and lend insight of implementing a call center of this nature.

In closing, the 3-1-1 Houston Service Helpline has become recognized worldwide as a popular resource for fostering neighborhood oriented government and a model of an accountability tool for city government.

**Some of the cities that have requested Houston to share it's experiences in the implementation and operations of a 3-1-1 call center are:**

City of Oakland, CA  
City of Dayton, OH  
City of Columbus, OH  
City of Austin, TX  
City of Seattle, WA  
City of Miami, FL  
City of El Paso, TX  
City of Chattanooga, TN  
City of New York, NY  
City of Olathe, KS  
City of Kansas City, MO  
City of Grand Rapids, MI  
City of Rockford, IL  
City of Honolulu, HI  
Nashville Government  
Miami Dade County, FL  
Harris County, TX  
Lafayette City-Parish Government  
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada  
City of Vancouver, Canada  
Region of Peel, Ontario Canada  
Regional Municipality of York, New Market Ontario  
City of Sendai, Japan  
City of Honolulu, HI

## NATIONAL PEER RECOGNITION CONTINUED

### **Public Technology, Inc.**

#### **Urban Consortium Steering Committee**

**Jim Ley**, Chair, Urban Consortium Steering Committee  
County Administrator  
Sarasota County, FL  
jley@co.sarasota.fl.us

**Sandy Vargas**, Vice Chair, Urban Consortium Steering Committee  
County Administrator  
Hennepin County, MN  
sandy.vargas@co.hennepin.mn.us

**Patricia T. Frazier**, PTI Board of Directors Representative  
Deputy City Manager  
City of San Diego, CA  
ptf@citymgr.sannet.gov

**Gordon Anderson**, Small Cities Representative  
Asst. City Manager  
City of Santa Monica, CA  
Gordon-Anderson@ci.santa-monica.ca.us

**Douglas Bartosh**, Chair, Public Safety Task Force  
Chief of Police  
City of Scottsdale, AZ  
dbartosh@ci.scottsdale.az.us

**Patty Boekamp**, Chair, Transportation Task Force  
Deputy Director  
Engineering & Capital Projects Dept.  
City of San Diego, CA  
pkb@sdcity.sannet.gov

**Roger Duncan**, Chair, Energy Task Force  
Vice President, Austin Energy  
City of Austin, TX  
roger.duncan@austinenergy.com

**Michael Armstrong**, Chair, Telecommunications and Information Task Force (2002)  
CIO  
City of Des Moines  
mrarmstrong@ci.des-moines.ia.us

**Dianah Neff**, Chair, Telecommunications and Information Task Force (2001)  
CIO  
City of Philadelphia, PA  
Dianah.Neff@phila.gov

**Douglas Yoder**, Chair, Environmental Task Force  
Assistant Director, DERM  
Miami-Dade County, FL  
yoderd@co.miami-dade.fl.us

**Charles McNeely**  
City Manager  
City of Reno, NV  
mcneely@ci.reno.nv.us

**Bruce F. Romer**  
Chief Administrative Officer  
Montgomery County, MD  
bruce.romer@co.mo.md.us

**Barbara Sheen Todd**  
Vice-Chairman, Pinellas County Commission  
Pinellas County, FL  
btodd@co.pinellas.fl.us

**Harvey Ruvin, Ex-Officio**  
Clerk of the Courts  
Miami-Dade County, FL  
clerk@co.miami-dade.fl.us--

County Administrator  
Hennepin County, MN  
sandy.vargas@co.hennepin.mn.us

**Patricia T. Frazier, PTI Board of Directors Representative**  
Deputy City Manager  
City of San Diego, CA  
ptf@citymgr.sannet.gov

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Chief of Police  
City of Scottsdale, AZ  
dbartosh@ci.scottsdale.az.us

**Patty Boekamp, Chair, Transportation Task Force**  
Deputy Director  
Engineering & Capital Projects Dept.  
City of San Diego, CA  
pkb@sdcity.sannet.gov

**Roger Duncan, Chair, Energy Task Force**  
Vice President, Austin Energy  
City of Austin, TX  
roger.duncan@austinenergy.com

**Michael Armstrong, Chair, Telecommunications and Information Task Force (2002)**  
CIO  
City of Des Moines  
mrarmstrong@ci.des-moines.ia.us

**Dianah Neff, Chair, Telecommunications and Information Task Force (2001)**  
CIO  
City of Philadelphia, PA  
Dianah.Neff@phila.gov

**Douglas Yoder, Chair, Environmental Task Force**  
Assistant Director, DERM  
Miami-Dade County, FL  
yoderd@co.miami-dade.fl.us

**Charles McNeely**  
City Manager  
City of Reno, NV  
mcneely@ci.reno.nv.us

**Bruce F. Romer**  
Chief Administrative Officer  
Montgomery County, MD  
bruce.romer@co.mo.md.us

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Vice-Chairman, Pinellas County Commission  
Pinellas County, FL  
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Miami-Dade County, FL  
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