



PAB

POLICE
ACCOUNTABILITY
BOARD

FROM CALL TO ARRIVAL:

How RPD
Responds to
911 Calls for
Service

An Oversight Investigation

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WHAT IS AN OVERSIGHT INVESTIGATION?

Pursuant to City Charter Article 18-5(K)(1), the Police Accountability Board (PAB) shall review and assess Rochester Police Department (RPD) policies, procedures, patterns and practices. In 2023, PAB voted to execute this duty with a process called oversight investigation. An oversight investigation is a thorough examination of all powers executed by RPD and its officers. It addresses a specific subject or aims to answer a particular question, but does not offer recommendations.

The tools of an oversight investigation include, but are not limited to, requests for information, oversight hearings, and education hearings. Following the completion of an oversight investigation, a report is presented to the PAB board. Once the final report is approved by the board, it is then disseminated to the mayor, police chief, city council, and the public. The report will be published at www.rocpab.org.

Data Release: The PAB has provided access to the raw data used for this report on www.rocpab.org. For questions or collaborations, contact the PAB at PABPO@CityofRochester.Gov.

DEFINITIONS

Arrival time: The time a police officer arrives at the location of the emergency.

Call taker: An Emergency Communications Department (ECD) employee who receives and records calls for service.

Create time: When a call is entered into the ECD system and sufficient information is gathered to begin dispatch.

Dispatcher: The ECD employee responsible for sending the appropriate response unit.

Dispatch time: When the ECD dispatcher dispatches RPD to the call.

Emergency Communications Department (ECD): The Monroe County agency responsible for managing 911 calls and dispatching emergency services, including police, fire, and EMS.

Key Performance Indicator (KPI): A measurement of whether the agency/department is meeting their performance goals.

Police response time: The amount of time between receiving a 911 call and a police officer arriving on the scene.

Source of Information request (SOI): Record request form used by the PAB and sent to RPD asking for information, data, records, etc.

911 call for service: A request for emergency assistance submitted through the 911 system.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This oversight investigation examines how the Rochester Police Department (RPD) responds to 911 calls for service. Using call-level data provided by the Monroe County Emergency Communications Department (ECD), this report examines the types of calls received by RPD, how these calls are prioritized, and how police response times vary over time, across different call types, priority levels, and geographic areas in the city. The results of the analyses are summarized below.

Finding 1: RPD officers are tasked with responding to a wide range of incidents, highlighting the complexity of their role. During the study period, about one-quarter of all 911 calls in Monroe County were routed to the RPD each year. These calls include everything from violent crimes and emergencies to community concerns and administrative requests.

Finding 2: RPD response times are nearly five minutes faster than a few years ago, but this is the result of faster call processing and dispatching rather than improved travel time from dispatch to arrival. In 2021, the median time from when a call was placed to when an officer arrived on scene was just over 25 minutes. By 2024, it decreased to 21 minutes. During this same period, the median dispatch-to-arrival times across all call types have remained consistent over the four-year period (approximately 6 minutes).

Finding 3: Despite most calls being labeled high priority by dispatch (63%), only a small fraction are classified as Tier 1 by RPD (1.2%) revealing a disconnect that may distort measures of urgency and performance. What ECD identifies as urgent, RPD often categorizes into mid- or lower-tier classifications in its performance framework.

Finding 4: While RPD is nearing its Tier 1 response time goal, there is worsening performance on Tier 2 and 3 calls. The analysis of the time between call receipt and arrival found RPD responded to 63.4% of calls within 10 minutes, an increase from 60.9% in 2022-2023. However, performance declined for Tier 2 and Tier 3 calls: only 54.8% of Tier 2 calls and 48.7% of Tier 3 calls met their respective response time goals in 2024, representing a decrease from the previous period.

Finding 5: Response times vary within RPD's tier system, showing inconsistencies in how calls are addressed in practice. Even within the same priority tier, response times to different types of calls vary widely, suggesting that the urgency or complexity of a situation is not always reflected in the actual speed of police response. This discrepancy complicates the notion that calls assigned the same priority are treated similarly in practice.

Finding 6: Response times for crime-related Tier 1 and Tier 2 calls vary across Rochester, indicating geographic disparities in access to timely police intervention. For high-priority (Tier 1) events, the western and some central tracts generally receive median response times that meet RPD's 10-minute KPI target. However, numerous tracts in the northeastern and southeastern parts of the city experience median Tier 1 response times substantially above 10 minutes. Further, while select tracts in the western portion of the city approach the 20-minute KPI benchmark for Tier 2 calls, most tracts across the city, particularly in the northeast, southeast, and peripheral areas, exhibit median response times that exceed 20 minutes.

BACKGROUND

The Rochester Police Accountability Board (PAB) has received numerous complaints from residents reporting delayed or absent police responses to 911 calls for service. Community members have described experiences in which they called 911 during emergencies and were met with extended wait periods or making multiple follow-up calls before officers arrived. In some cases, no police response occurred at all. These concerns have raised important questions about the effectiveness and consistency of emergency police services in the City of Rochester. Additionally, council members have expressed interest and concern in RPD emergency response times during meetings with the PAB and public hearings, such as the RPD budget hearing of 2024.

In response to these concerns, this project examines how the Rochester Police Department (RPD) responds to 911 calls for service. Using call-level data provided by the Monroe County Emergency Communications Department (ECD), this study explores if there are any existing patterns in police response times across different call types, priority levels, and geographic areas within the city.

METHODOLOGY

This study explores police response times to 911 calls for service routed through ECD and responded to by RPD between March 14, 2021, and December 31, 2024. While this analysis focuses specifically on calls involving RPD, it is important to note that ECD is a county-wide service that also dispatches for other law enforcement agencies, EMS, fire services, and additional emergency responders. The data used in this analysis was obtained directly from ECD and includes every 911 call that involved an RPD response during the study period. Calls prior to March 14, 2021, were excluded due to a software transition at ECD that resulted in formatting inconsistencies, rendering earlier records unreliable.

Each call record included multiple time-based fields including the time of call receipt, dispatch, en route, arrival, and closure, as well as the location of the emergency and the ECD-assigned priority.

This analysis focuses on one primary response time interval: the time from call receipt to officer arrival. This reflects the total time experienced by the caller awaiting assistance and is therefore the most direct measure of community impact. It captures the time from the moment a person reaches out for help to when an officer is physically on scene.

Prior to analyzing response times, the dataset was cleaned to address outliers (defined as observations falling beyond three standard deviations from the mean in key time intervals as well as calls that lasted less than a minute or over 24 hours), erroneous timestamps (e.g., dates recorded as occurring in 1969), and invalid or incorrectly typed addresses. The records where address information was not reliably available were excluded from the spatial analysis. For geographic assessments, calls were aggregated at the census tract level to evaluate variation in response times across the city.

CALL PRIORITIZATION

Currently, call prioritization systems differ between the ECD and RPD. ECD has two ways to prioritize calls. The first consists of a numeric scale ranging from zero to nine, approved collaboratively by all relevant agencies. Priority level zero is reserved for the most critical incidents such as airplane emergencies or situations involving police, fire, or EMS personnel in distress and is rarely assigned. Most calls fall within levels one to four, with level one indicating the highest urgency among these. The second way that ECD prioritizes calls in the system is either an “A” or “B” event, with “A” representing higher priority than “B.” Unlike the numeric scale, RPD officers utilize this classification system when on the road.

However, as noted in RPD’s response to a 2025 Source of Information (SOI) request, officers frequently re-prioritize calls in the field based on “officer’s discretion using their training, the implications of the specific jobs before them, and their common sense.” This incident-level re-prioritization is not documented in the data provided to the PAB. Among calls classified as "A" events, officers generally exercise discretion in selecting which incident to address first, unless directly guided by a supervisor.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

To evaluate the timeliness of police responses to emergency calls, RPD established a set of internal performance benchmarks, or KPIs. RPD introduced these metrics in 2015 as part of a broader effort to improve how the department analyzes calls-for-service data. These benchmarks continue to appear in the City's budget book to measure the performance of the RPD patrol division.

RPD assigns every call type to one of five internal categories: Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier 3, Proactive Policing, or Administrative. Only Tiers 1 through 3 are represented in the budget book. According to language in the budget book, RPD describes Tier 1 calls as immediate, Tier 2 as elevated, and Tier 3 as normal. Under RPD's goals, officers should respond to 65 percent of Tier 1 calls within 10 minutes. For Tier 2 calls, the target is a response within 20 minutes for 60 percent of incidents. For Tier 3, the goal is a 30-minute response for 60 percent of calls. These internal thresholds aim to measure departmental efficiency.

However, RPD uses this tiered system strictly for post-response analysis. Officers responding to 911 calls do not receive any information about KPI tiers. During a formal meeting with the PAB, RPD staff confirmed that officers are unaware of the KPI system while in the field.

Instead, ECD assigns each call an "A" or "B" priority label, with "A" indicating higher urgency. Officers typically decide which "A" call to respond to first, unless a supervisor directs them otherwise. As a result, the KPI tiering framework does not guide real-time decision-making or deployment.

RPD internally maps nearly 200 distinct call types to the five categories mentioned above, but this classification list is not publicly available. The department stated that only the most serious emergencies fall into Tier 1, which ends up making a very small percentage of calls. While this system helps RPD monitor general response trends, it may fail to capture the urgency or impact of incidents experienced by residents.

The PAB analyzed how RPD categorizes these call types and whether those designations align with actual response times and community experiences. This analysis asks whether the department's internal framework accurately reflects public safety needs or masks disparities in service delivery.

The following section presents the findings of the PAB's oversight investigation. It explores how response times vary by call category, geographic area, and priority level, and compares actual performance against RPD's KPIs. The analysis identifies emerging patterns and disparities by evaluating the alignment between official benchmarks and lived experiences of emergency response.

FINDINGS

Finding 1: RPD officers are tasked with responding to a wide range of incidents, highlighting the complexity of their role.

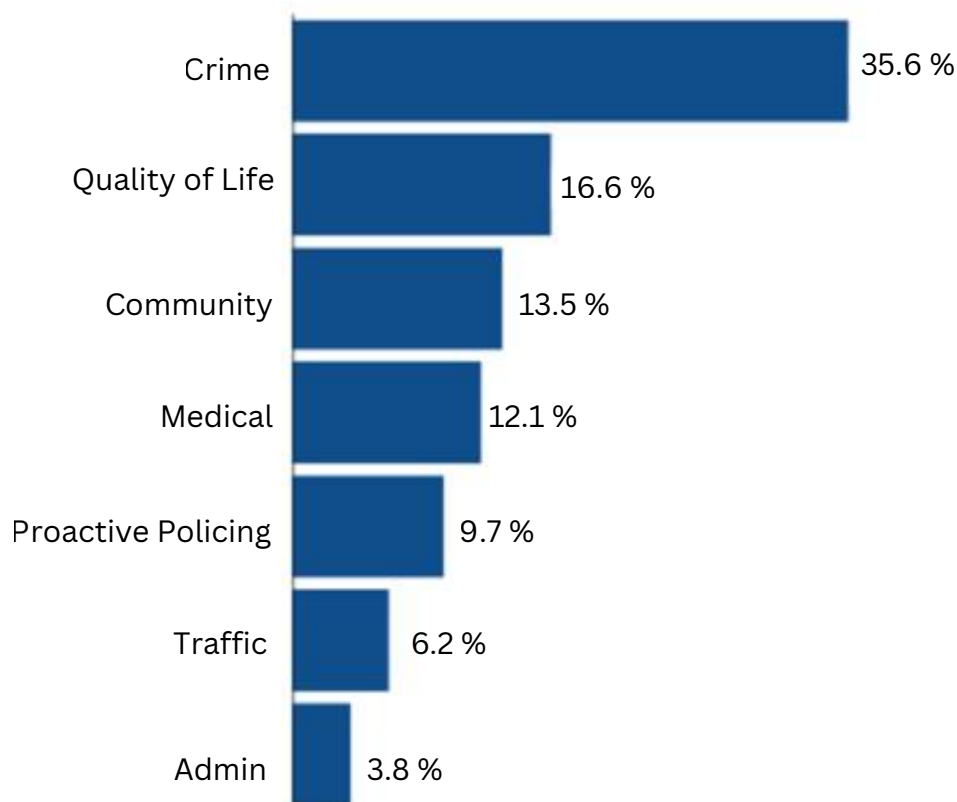


Figure 1: The proportion of total 911 calls routed to RPD that fall into each bucket. Data are sourced from ECD and include all calls routed to RPD from March 14, 2021 to December 31, 2024.

Each year, about one-quarter of all 911 calls in Monroe County are routed to the RPD.¹ These calls cover everything from violent crimes and emergencies to community concerns and administrative requests.

¹ According to ECD annual reports.

RPD's own internal classification system groups these calls into broad categories, which they refer to as buckets. RPD defines these buckets as:

1. Crime: Calls related to criminal activity or reports of crime.
2. Quality of Life: Generally non-violent issues that affect community wellbeing to preserve public order and prevent more serious crimes later.
3. Community: These are calls to address neighborhood wellbeing.
4. Medical: Emergency and non-emergency calls that include medical services.
5. Proactive Policing: Calls that are generated internally by officers for crime prevention and enforcement purposes.
6. Traffic: Calls initiated by the public or officers that require police response due to traffic conditions or incidents.
7. Admin: Non-emergency, technical, or support-related calls, often routed to services.

Figure 1 illustrates the proportion of total calls routed to the RPD that fall into each bucket. According to their framework, 35.6% of calls involved crime, followed by quality-of-life issues (16.6%), community-related matters (13.5%), and medical emergencies (12.1%). The remaining buckets included proactive policing (9.7%), traffic-related incidents (6.2%), and administrative calls (3.8%).

RPD's internal classification system groups these calls into broad categories, helping illustrate the diversity of situations officers respond to. However, these categories include a wide array of events varying in urgency. For example, 'crime' includes both violent crimes like an active assailant and nonviolent crimes like forgery, while 'community' includes things that range from a bomb threat to suspicious mail to a hydrant out of service. 'Medical' includes events that range from a welfare check to electrocution to a violent psychiatric person. 'Proactive policing' contains calls related to several things such as traffic stops, prisoner transports, foot patrol. 'Quality of life' covers calls that range from annoyance calls to events categorized as parking incidents. 'Admin' calls include calls such as an administrative message from police and K9 incidents. Finally, the 'traffic' bucket includes calls regarding motor vehicle accidents and school crossings, among others.

Finding 2: RPD response times are nearly 5 minutes faster than a few years ago, but this is the result of faster call processing and dispatching rather than improved travel time from dispatch to arrival.

Figure 2 shows that the median time from call receipt to officer arrival for all call types decreased from just over 25 minutes in 2021 to 21 minutes in 2024.

However, when examining the median dispatch-to-arrival time, which is the time from when ECD dispatches the call to RPD to when the officer arrives at the event, there is a more constant picture. The second line in Figure 2 shows the median dispatch-to-arrival time has remained consistent at approximately six minutes over the four-year period.

The stability in dispatch-to-arrival time indicates that once officers are dispatched, their arrival time to the scene has not significantly changed. This means that the reduction in total call-to-arrival time seems to stem not from faster officer travel, but from improvements in what happens before dispatch, i.e. call handling, or dispatching processes.

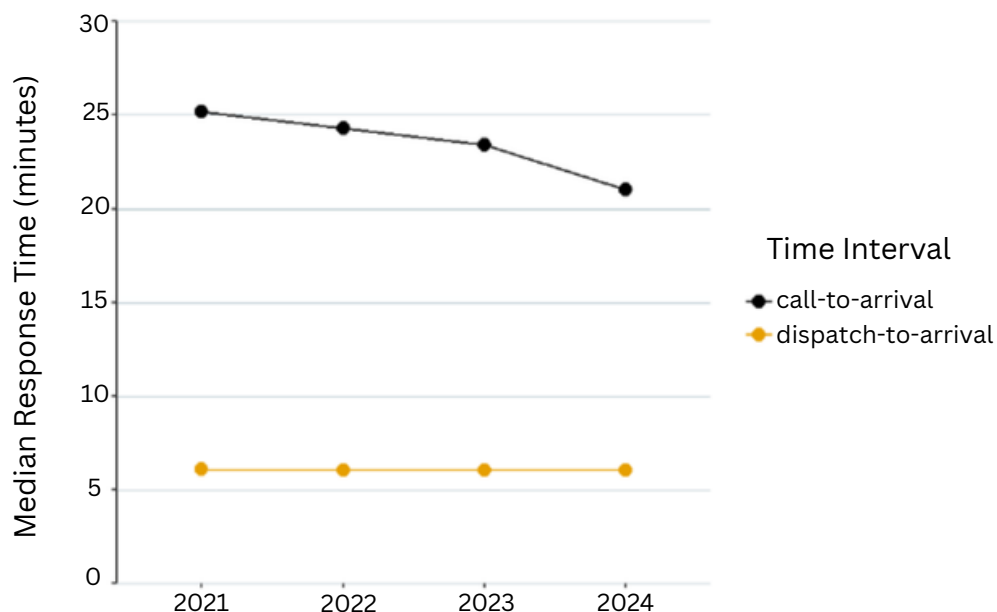


Figure 2: Median response time in minutes for each year during the study period. Response time is measured as call creation to officer arrival on scene and call dispatch to officer arrival on scene.

Finding 3: Despite most calls being labeled high priority by dispatch, only a small fraction are classified as Tier 1 by RPD, revealing a disconnect that may distort measures of urgency and performance.

RPD uses a tier-based framework to evaluate its responsiveness, classifying each call as Tier 1 (immediate), 2 (elevated), or 3 (normal), with additional categories for proactive and administrative calls. Figure 3 displays the proportion of calls that fall within each tier. Only 1.2% of calls are designated as Tier 1, which is supposed to represent the most urgent incidents. Most calls are placed in Tier 2 (43.9%) and Tier 3 (38.9%), while 12.8% are labeled as proactive policing and 3.2% as administrative. Only Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 are factored into RPD's official KPIs.

Figure 4 illustrates the proportion of calls classified as priority level one, two, three, or four by ECD. According to ECD's classification system, 63.3% of all calls routed to RPD during the study period were labeled as priority level 1, and another 22.5% were marked as priority level two. In other words, nearly 86% of calls sent to RPD were considered high urgency by dispatch at the time they occurred.

The data shows a disconnect between these two systems. What ECD identifies as urgent, RPD often categorizes into mid- or lower-tier classifications in its performance framework. This raises important questions about whether RPD's internal benchmarks genuinely reflect the urgency of the calls it receives.

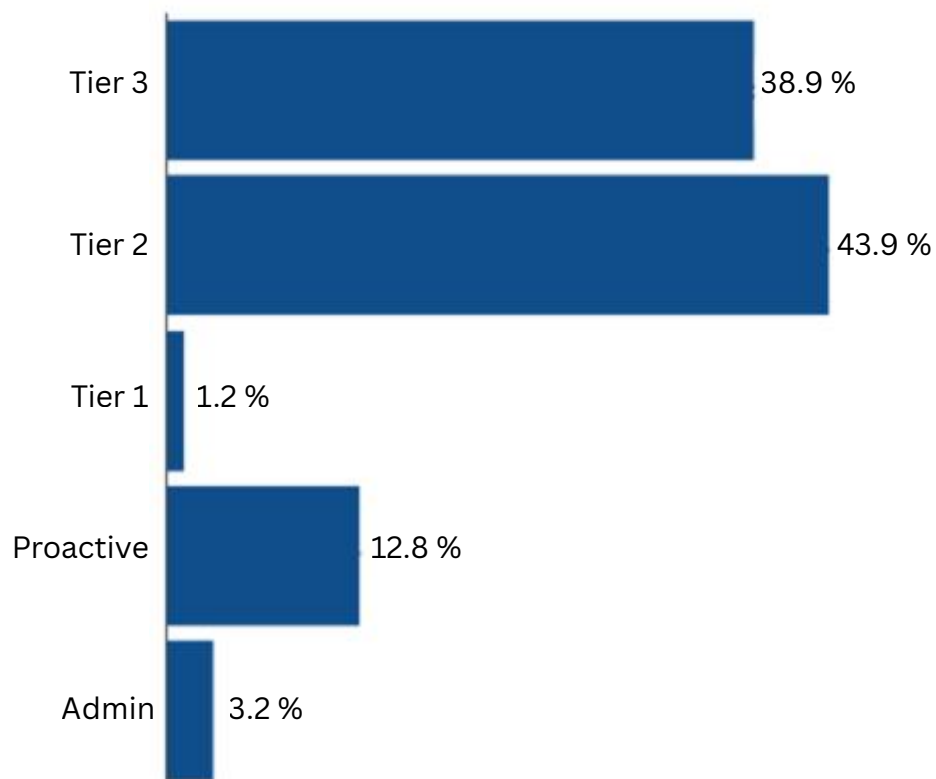


Figure 3: Proportion of calls routed to RPD according to their internal tier system.

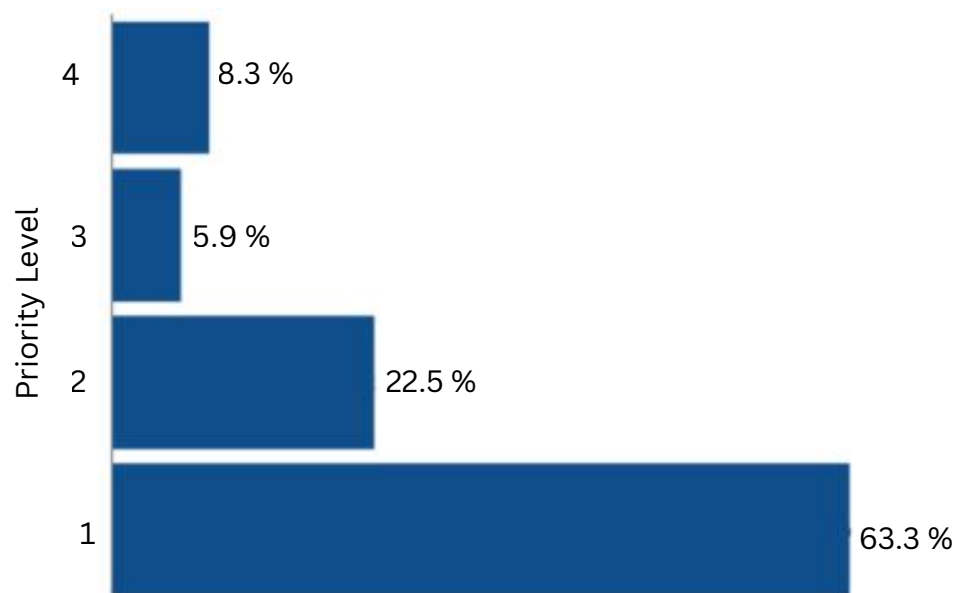


Figure 4: Proportion of calls routed to RPD according to priority level. Less than 0.01% of calls were classified as priority zero, which include airplane incidents and police/fire/EMS responders in trouble. Similarly, less than 0.01% of calls routed to RPD were classified as priority level five, six, seven, eight, or nine.

Finding 4: While RPD is nearing its Tier 1 response time goal, there is worsening performance on Tier 2 and Tier 3 calls.

The RPD sets internal performance benchmarks to guide timely responses to emergency calls, aiming for 65% of Tier 1 (immediate) calls to be answered within 10 minutes, 60% of Tier 2 (elevated) calls within 20 minutes, and 60% of Tier 3 (normal) calls within 30 minutes.

Analysis of recent data reveals mixed outcomes relative to these targets, displayed in Table 1. In 2024, when looking at the time between ECD call receipt and time of officer arrival to event, RPD nearly met the Tier 1 benchmark, with 63.4% of calls responded to within 10 minutes, higher than the 60.9% in 2022-2023. However, performance declined for Tier 2 and Tier 3 calls: only 54.8% of Tier 2 calls and 48.7% of Tier 3 calls met their respective response time goals in 2024, representing a decrease from the previous period. These results point to areas where response efforts may benefit from continued evaluation, particularly to ensure that performance targets are met consistently across call types and geographic areas. When focusing on the time between ECD dispatching RPD and officer arrival to event, response rates against internal KPIs appear better than when measured from call receipt.

Key Performance Indicators	RPD Budget Book Benchmark	Actual 2022-2023*	Actual – Call Receipt to Arrival 2024†	Actual – Dispatch to Arrival 2024†
% Tier 1 calls under 10 minutes	65%	60.9%	63.4%	86.84%
% Tier 2 calls under 20 minutes	60%	61.2%	54.8%	86.37%
% Tier 3 calls under 30 minutes	60%	63.8%	48.7%	77%

*Table 1: Key performance indicators. Note: * RPD budget book. † PAB calculations.*

Finding 5: Response times vary within RPD's tier system and reveal inconsistencies in how calls are addressed in practice.

Even within the same priority tier, response times to different types of calls vary widely, suggesting that the urgency or complexity of a situation is not always reflected in the actual speed of police response. This discrepancy complicates the notion that calls assigned the same priority are treated similarly in practice.

In 2024, for example, within Tier 1 crime-related events, response times ranged from under four minutes for robberies in progress (ROBBA: 3.83 minutes) and shots/sees shooter (SHOTA: 3.98 minutes) and over 15 minutes for assault/rape (ASLTA: 15.68 minutes).

For Tier 2 calls, the range is even more pronounced. Family trouble in progress (FMTRA), for instance, had a median response time of over 30 minutes, while suspicious persons or incident (SUSPA) were responded to in just under 11 minutes, and burglary in progress (BURGA) averaged just over 13 minutes. Calls involving a fight with a weapon (WEAPA: 14.02 minutes) were met with a quicker average than calls reporting a rape that just occurred (RAPEA: 19.83 minutes) or warrant subject present (WARRA: 28.03 minutes), highlighting variation in call prioritization even within similarly serious event types.

Within Tier 2, medical and community-related calls also display a notable range. A mental health-related police intervention (PD_MENTAL_HEALTH) took an average of over 32 minutes, whereas responses to drowning calls (DRWNA: 4.62 minutes) were far faster. Community concerns like animal incidents (ANMLA: 39.99 minutes) and missing persons (MSPRA: 40.17 minutes) faced some of the longest delays in any Tier 2 category.

Overall, these findings raise questions about how urgency is operationalized on the ground. The data suggests that not all calls within a given tier receive comparable attention or response times. This inconsistency points to a potential misalignment between formal call categorizations and the lived urgency of those calling for help.

Finding 6: Response times for crime-related calls vary across Rochester, indicating geographic disparities in access to timely police intervention.

This finding focuses on crime-related calls classified as Tier 1 and Tier 2 because these incidents represent the core of public safety work and are most closely associated with RPD's traditional role.

Figure 5 illustrates median response times for Tier 1 calls classified under RPD's crime bucket across Rochester census tracts in 2024, following the department's most recent realignment of 2023.

The map reveals pronounced geographic variation in emergency response to these high-priority incidents. The western and some central tracts generally exhibit faster response times, with medians closer to or below RPD's 10-minute KPI target. In contrast, numerous tracts in the northeastern and southeastern parts of the city report median Tier 1 response times substantially above 10 minutes, with several exceeding 15 minutes. This uneven distribution suggests that residents' access to timely police intervention during the most urgent crime-related events varies depending on where they live.

Figure 6 displays median response times for Tier 2 calls falling within RPD's crime category. The spatial pattern is similar to that observed for Tier 1 calls but with more pronounced delays. While select tracts in the western portion of the city approach the 20-minute KPI benchmark for Tier 2 calls, most tracts across the city, particularly in the northeast, southeast, and surrounding areas, exhibit median response times that exceed 20 minutes, with several surpassing 25 or 30 minutes. These extended delays for mid-priority crime-related incidents point to possible systemic challenges in achieving consistent response times across neighborhoods.

Median Response Time for Tier 1 Crime Events

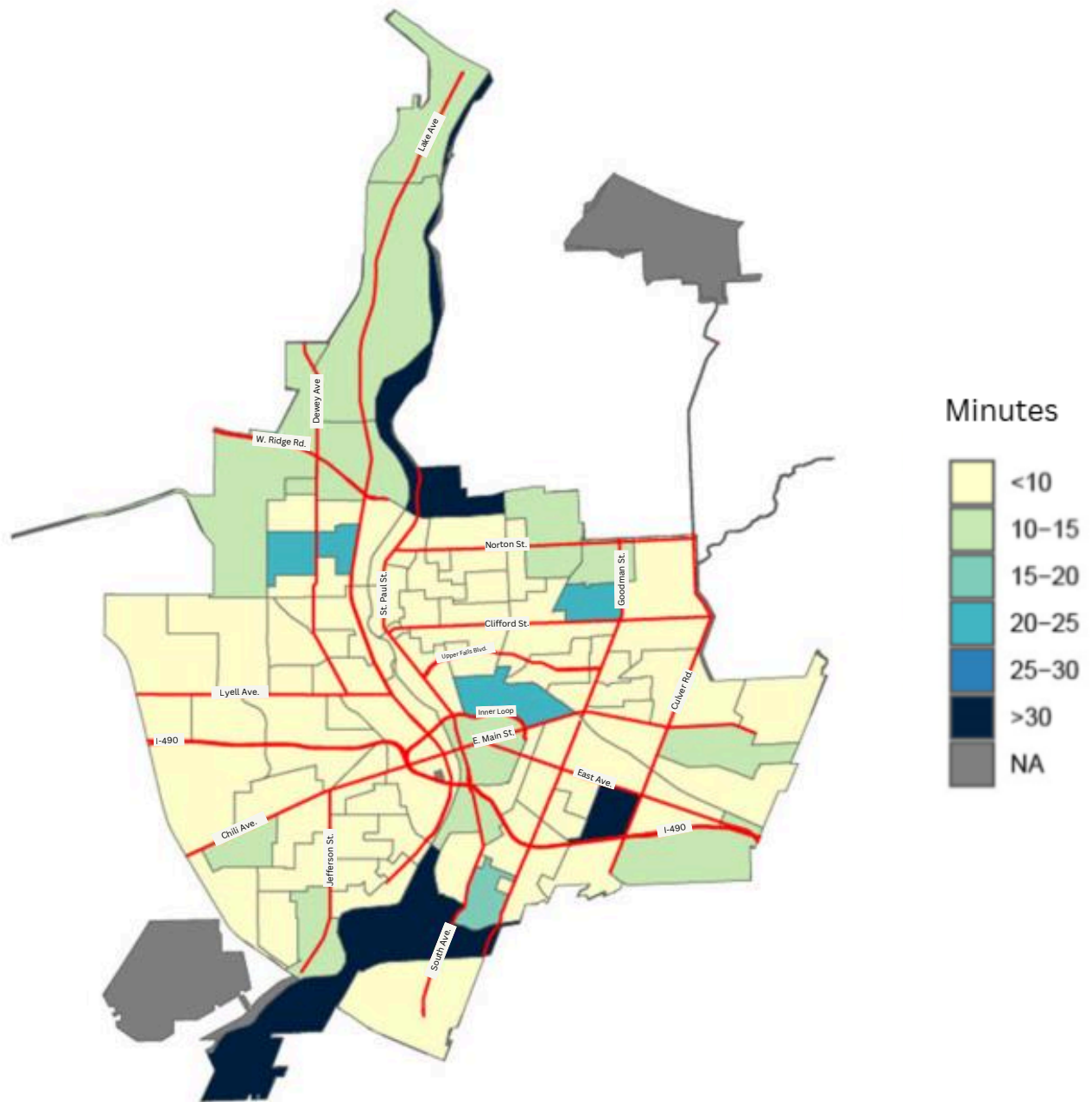


Figure 5: Displays median response times for Tier 1 calls falling within RPD's crime category.

Median Response Time for Tier 2 Crime Events

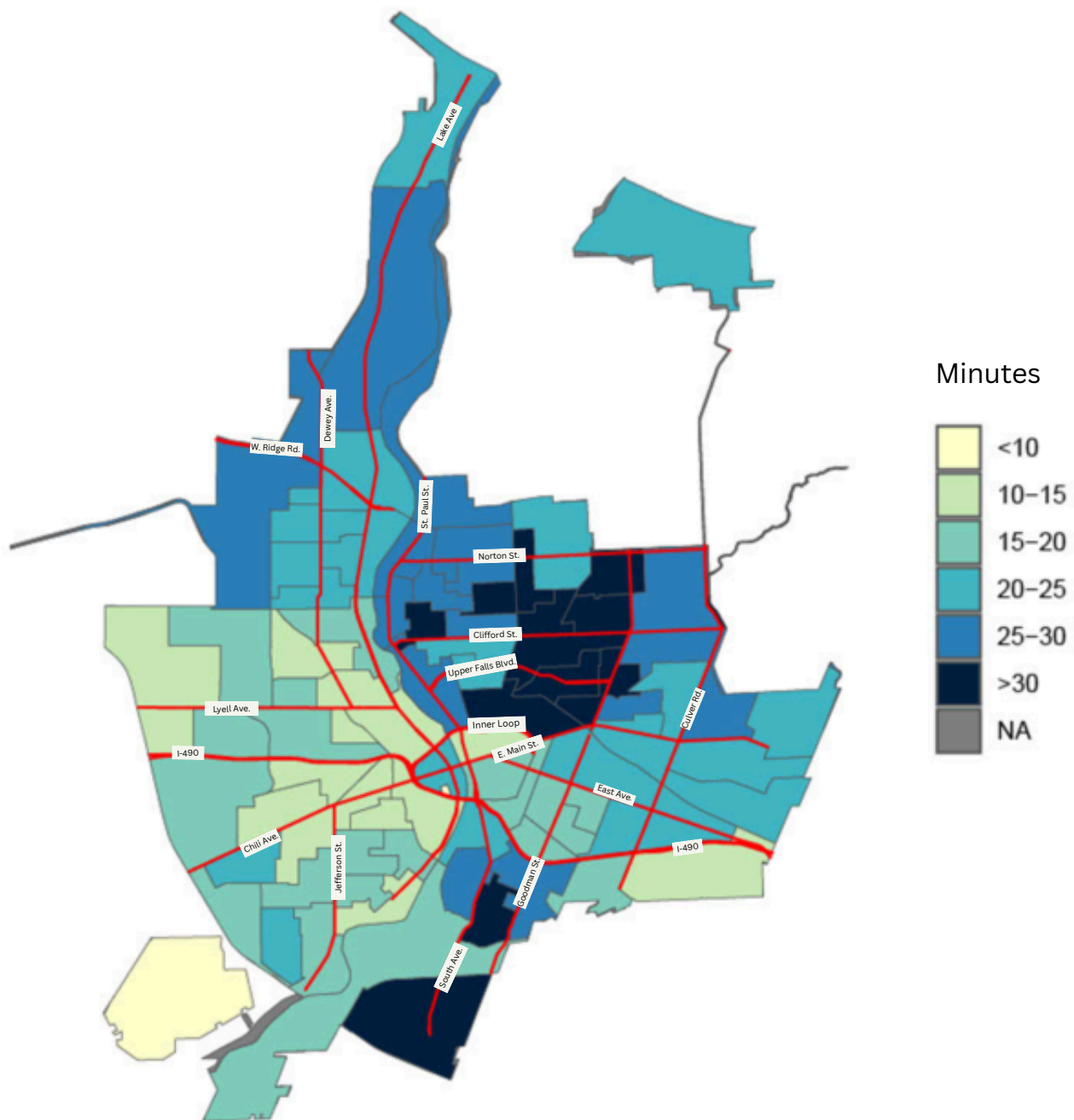


Figure 6: Displays median response times for Tier 2 calls falling within RPD's crime category.

CONCLUSION

This oversight investigation is an examination of how the RPD responds to 911 calls for service and reveals important insights about performance and equity. While RPD has improved overall response times since 2021, based on the data provided to the PAB, the gains are largely due to quicker pre-dispatch call processing rather than the changes in officer deployment or travel. The report also identifies inconsistencies between how call urgency is classified by ECD dispatchers at the time of the event and how those calls are later categorized internally by RPD for analytical purposes. These discrepancies raise questions about the alignment of performance metrics with the lived experiences of the people of Rochester.

The research also highlights geographic disparities in police response to high-priority crime incidents. While some neighborhoods benefit from swift responses, others, especially the northeastern and southeastern parts of the city, experience substantially longer wait times. Additionally, response time variability within RPD's own tier system suggests that current classifications do not reliably reflect either urgency or impact.

Ultimately, this report underscores the need for greater clarity and alignment between performance frameworks, operational practices, and community expectations. The findings invite a broader conversation about how emergency response is defined, measured, and delivered, as well as who may be left waiting in moments of critical need.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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