

The primary responsibility of city and state leaders is public safety. This includes minimizing citizen vulnerability, and in the case of accidents, providing for the rescue and on-scene treatment of the injured, and transport to the nearest hospital able to provide a concomitant response for the level of injury.

Fire Departments across the Valley work in concert, regardless of city boundaries. As a result of our Mutual and Automatic Aid Agreements, highly skilled paramedics provide critical medical care for the injured. We have greatly improved the ability of our police and fire members to communicate. Tempe, Phoenix and Mesa are implementing an interoperable communications system, in which police and fire members can talk directly with one another, share information and save precious minutes when lives are in the balance.

But having our cities' public safety professionals respond quickly to a family member in an emergency isn't enough. Once patients are stabilized, ambulances carry them to receive trauma care. Where do the critically injured in the East Valley go to receive that care?

Tempe is fortunate to be situated fairly centrally between Scottsdale Healthcare Osborn and Maricopa Medical Center, which means rapid, professional surgical response for the most devastating of injuries. Having grown up in Tempe, just north of the river, Scottsdale Healthcare was where mom and dad took me when I needed attention after an automobile accident. It is also where Tempe Police Officer Jim Quill was airlifted when another vehicle swerved into his motorcycle after his shift last week. The accident occurred at the intersection of McClintock and Ray – nearly 15 miles of heavily congested streets from the nearest Level 1 Trauma Center. Not long ago, another Tempe officer, shot seven times by a perpetrator, was saved due to the fast work by the team at the Maricopa Medical Center. But for our neighbors further south and east, the distance is much greater.

Currently, East Valley residents, Scottsdale Healthcare and Maricopa Medical Center are the nearest facilities for traumatically injured patients. The US60, the I10, and SR87 to Payson all carry heavy loads and high speeds, and this translates into some of the worst fatality statistics in the nation. While the Arizona Republic reported last summer that traffic fatalities were down for the year, our state remains fifth in the nation for traffic related deaths.

Arizona remains one of the fastest growing states in the nation. Projections show that population in Maricopa County is likely to double to over 6 million by 2030. While Tempe is landlocked, with fairly stable population numbers, our neighbors in Chandler, Mesa, Gilbert and Scottsdale are all growing. And related to that density, Tempe, Scottsdale, Mesa and Chandler have the highest employment rates, creating highly congested patterns of movement every day.

With the demand for medical professionals skilled in trauma treatment, the need for more nursing students from ASU and our Community Colleges, and the unfortunate supply of trauma injuries, a teaching hospital is one pragmatic option, with programs such as those at Maricopa Medical Center in Phoenix. Creative partnerships, civic and private leadership, and public demand can make such a needed possibility a reality. Now it is time to focus our attention on addressing this shortcoming in the East Valley. Count Tempe as prepared to help in this effort.