



## ISSUE BACKGROUNDER

Date: January 20, 2021

# Provincial Investigation into Creating an Alberta Police Force

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In May 2020, Alberta's Fair Deal Panel (FDP) released a final report comprised of 25 recommendations "for actions that Alberta can take to get fair treatment within Confederation." One of the recommendations from the report was to "Create an Alberta Police Service to replace the RCMP." The Province accepted the recommendation as a recommendation "where there is support to conduct further analysis". Starting in the fall of 2020 the province has moved quickly on this recommendation and through the Justice and Solicitor General department, established a new Provincial Police Services Transition Secretariat. Subsequently, PriceWaterhouseCooper (PwC) was selected to undertake the "Alberta Provincial Police Service Transition Study". The study is scheduled to be completed by April 30, 2021.

RMA has not specifically supported or opposed the creation of a provincial police service, but has instead focused its advocacy to both the Fair Deal Panel and now Alberta Justice and Solicitor General on three areas:

- ◆ Municipalities should not face increased costs to support the shift to a provincial police service.
- ◆ A provincial police service should provide the same or an increased level of service to what is currently provided by the RCMP.
- ◆ A provincial police service should provide the same or an increased level of municipal and community input into police to what is currently provided by the RCMP.

The FDP Final report acknowledges Alberta would lose the current 30% federal RCMP funding cost share of \$112 M with a transition to a provincial police force. Initial RMA analysis also indicates numerous other costs required to form a large new force to add to the cost impact. Additionally, jurisdictional policing salary comparisons suggest salary savings would not be probable due to the current low comparative pay of the RCMP. Recent detailed Alberta polling by the National Police Federation is shared that contrasts the FDP's one survey question that addressed support for a provincial police service. The FDP's survey question asked respondents to rank several options being reviewed by the panel based on the extent to which each would improve Alberta's place in Confederation. Among the 13 options that received rankings, a provincial police service ranked 11<sup>th</sup>, ahead of only Alberta separating from Canada and the appointment of a provincial Chief Firearms Officer. The National Police Federation poll in contrast showed substantial satisfaction for the RCMP through various questions and asked a specific question about opinions on forming a provincial police force. Only 6% of respondents in communities served by RCMP supported replacing the RCMP with a provincial police service.

Next steps are projected with the only thing known for sure that is that PwC Alberta Provincial Police Service Transition Study is expected to be complete by April 30, 2021. It is anticipated that a referendum question asking Albertans whether to create an Alberta Police Service to replace the RCMP might be added to the October 2021 municipal election ballot with other provincial referendum questions being considered.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Fair Deal Panel Engagement**

Beginning in December 2019, the Fair Deal Panel (FDP) consulted with individual Albertans and stakeholder organizations through town hall sessions, targeted consultations with organizations, a request for electronic submissions from organizations and individuals, and a public survey.

According to [Premier Kenney's November 9, 2019 mandate letter to the FDP](#), panelists had a broad mandate to consider a range of ideas that would "strengthen the province's economic position, give us a bigger voice within Confederation, or increase provincial power over institutions and funding in areas of provincial jurisdiction." The letter also listed a series of specific ideas and initiatives that the FDP was to research and determine whether they would advance the province's interests. Included in this list was the establishment of a provincial police force.

RMA submitted written input to the FDP on several initiatives identified in their mandate letter that impact rural municipalities. This included the formation of a provincial police service. RMA's input to the panel was regarding a provincial police force was as follows:

Rural municipalities across Alberta are currently facing high crime rates, with the situation reaching a crisis point in some areas of the province. High rural crime rates are driven by several factors, including a downturn in Alberta's economy, limited rural mental health and social services, an under-resourced provincial justice system unable to address repeat offenders, and a lack of policing capacity to monitor rural areas and respond to rural property crimes in a timely manner.

While rural policing in Alberta faces several challenges, it is unclear to RMA how the establishment of a provincial police force would improve public safety in rural areas, given that ending the Alberta Police Service Agreement would presumably result in a reduction or elimination of the federal financial contribution to policing in Alberta. Under the current Alberta Police Service Agreement, Canada contributes 30% of the costs of operating provincial police services in areas of the province governed by the Agreement. Additionally, under a provincial policing model, Alberta would be required to assume greater administrative and oversight responsibilities which would also carry added costs. This shift in cost responsibilities would not only compromise =policing service levels, but also likely will divert funding from enhancing the Alberta's broader criminal justice system, such as the addition of Crown prosecutors, that may be more impactful in reducing rural crime than any change to current police funding or operations.

The likely higher costs associated with a provincial policing approach may be worthwhile if they are accompanied by improved frontline police service in rural areas and enhanced local input into policing. However, the Government of Alberta has already shown that they can increase service levels under the current system if they are willing to assume (or pass on to municipalities) the additional costs required to do so. In December 2019, the Government of Alberta announced that municipalities who currently receive funding under the Agreement will be required to contribute 10% of the province's costs (increasing to 30% in 2023) to support an additional 300 RCMP officers and 200 administrative staff.

Given that the Government of Alberta already has the ability to increase the investment in policing, procure additional RCMP resources, and work with the RCMP to determine where they should be assigned under the current Agreement, RMA would require additional information as to how a provincial police force would enhance the Government of Alberta's control over policing to an extent that would justify the likely increased cost (particularly given the loss of federal funding should Alberta end the Alberta Police Service Agreement), and

how such a shift would improve frontline services. Further, details on recruitment to support necessary service needs of a newly established provincial police force need to be clarified.

### Fair Deal Panel Final Report

In May 2020, Alberta's Fair Deal Panel (FDP) released a [final report](#) comprised of 25 recommendations "for actions that Alberta can take to get fair treatment within Confederation."

Recommendation 14 of the report stated the following – "Create an Alberta Police Service to replace the RCMP."

*\*(See full copy of Recommendation 14 of the report attached to this backgrounder)*

The FDP supported their recommendation based on several issues they associated with current RCMP service. Specifically, the panel identified a lack of community familiarity among RCMP officers due to frequent transfers, bureaucracy and a lack of responsiveness to local community needs associated with the centralization of RCMP decision-making in Ottawa, and the inefficient use of Albertans' financial contributions to policing, as in the words of the panel, a provincial police service "would send a message to Ottawa that Alberta was in charge of its destiny, and that it would rather to spend its own money on its own men and women, rather than paying for a bloated Ottawa bureaucracy." The panel also identified chronic understaffing of RCMP detachments, particularly in smaller communities, as an issue.

The FDP argued that although some input supported maintaining the RCMP, "they seemed motivated either by a sentimental attachment to the RCMP or a concern about the extra cost and red tape associated with creating a provincial police force." In other words, the FDP suggested that few respondents indicated that the RCMP was policing the province effectively, and that only sentimentality or the complexity of replacing them were reasons given for maintaining their role.

Following their summary of the weaknesses associated with current RCMP service, the panel summarized what, in their view, would be the advantages of a provincial police service. These included increased local control over policing, increased nimbleness in shifting resources throughout the province in relation to crime trends and changing regional needs, greater stability for police and community members, and increased local knowledge on the part of officers.

The FDP's final report acknowledges that a shift to a provincial police service would come with a cost. Specifically, cancelling the current agreement between the Government of Alberta and RCMP would result in the province taking on responsibility for covering the \$112.4 million that the federal government currently contributes to RCMP policing in Alberta annually. The report also briefly acknowledges implementation costs in addition to losing federal funding but explains them away by stating that "short-run costs could be absorbed by efficiencies of scale and scope across policing regions within the province." Interestingly, the report also specifically references the potential cost impacts that the transition to a provincial police force may have on municipalities, stating that "any extra costs incurred by Alberta [through a shift to a provincial police service] should not be passed on to municipalities without their consent."

Although summaries of the written and verbal input provided to the FDP is not publicly available, the FDP's final report includes a summary of the results of the 42,134 online surveys completed by Albertans and public opinion research based on input from 1000 Albertans. Only one survey question addresses support for a provincial police service. The question asks respondents to rank several options being reviewed by the panel based on the extent to which each would improve Alberta's place in Confederation. Among the 13 options that received rankings, a provincial police service ranked 11<sup>th</sup>, ahead of Alberta separating from Canada and the appointment of a provincial Chief Firearms Officer.

## Government of Alberta Response to Fair Deal Panel Final Report

In June 2020 the government published their responses to the recommendations of the report (see [Government of Alberta's response to the Fair Deal Panel report](#)). The responses fell under four categories:

1. Recommendations where the work is already underway.
2. Recommendations which are agreed to in principle.
3. Recommendations where there is support to conduct further analysis.
4. Recommendations where modifications are required to align with government platform and/or policy direction.

The formation of a provincial police force fell under the third recommendation category.

The province has since moved quickly on this recommendation. In September 2020 the Government of Alberta, through Alberta Justice and Solicitor General, established a new Alberta Provincial Police Services Transition Secretariat for a two-year term and recruited internal staff. In addition it issued a tender for a contractor to presumably conduct a study on the potential costs, benefits and logistics of replacing RCMP services with a provincial police service (See [Alberta pursuing detailed study on creating provincial police service](#)). Subsequently, later in the fall the province selected PriceWaterhouseCooper (PwC) to undertake the "Alberta Provincial Police Service Transition Study". The study is scheduled to be completed by April 30, 2021.

On a related note, the Justice and Solicitor General Department enacted the Referendum, Senate Election and Local Authorities Election Forms Regulation on December 2, 2020. This regulation provides the legislative ability for the province to add provincial referendum questions to this fall's municipal election ballot.

Premier Kenney has stated that [Alberta will hold a referendum on equalization payments](#), one of the recommendations of the FDP report, and that other recommendations from the report would also require Albertans' approval by referendum to be considered. It is anticipated that once the current Alberta Provincial Police Service Transition Study is complete this spring, that a decision will be made as to whether the provincial police force FDP recommendation, and other FDP recommendations, will be added to this October's municipal ballot as additional referendum questions.

## RMA Input to current Alberta Provincial Police Service Transition Study

In late 2020, Minister of Justice and Solicitor General Kaycee Madu invited RMA board members, along with representatives from other municipal associations, to participate in a provincial police service "envisioning exercise." The organizers of the exercise, the Alberta Provincial Police Services Transition Secretariat staff and PwC Canada, made it clear that its intent was not to discuss whether a provincial police service was a good or bad idea, but rather to brainstorm the "ideal" characteristics of a provincial police force to assist PwC in developing a delivery model. The costs of a provincial police service (including how cost responsibilities would be allocated) were identified as beyond the scope of the session.

These scope restrictions made it difficult for RMA to provide input into the envisioning exercise, as separating services from their costs is a challenging task for municipal leaders, especially as the Government of Alberta has already shown a recent interest in shifting costs for policing onto municipalities. Despite this, RMA participated in discussions related to areas such as workforce and culture, operational capabilities, data and technology, and governance, accountability and regulatory frameworks related to a potential provincial police service.

Through this process the RMA reiterated its position statements made to the Fair Deal Panel regarding a Provincial Police Force:

- ◆ Municipalities should not face increased costs to support the shift to a provincial police service.

- ◆ A provincial police service should provide the same or an increased level of service to what is currently provided by the RCMP.
- ◆ A provincial police service should provide the same or an increased level of municipal and community input into police to what is currently provided by the RCMP.

## **ANALYSIS AND CONSIDERATIONS**

At this point, all the questions related to a provincial police service raised in RMA's initial input to the FDP remain unanswered. Of particular importance to RMA are two assumptions built into the FDP's recommendation for the formation of a provincial police service:

- ◆ That the current service provided by RCMP would be improved through a provincial police service.
- ◆ That any cost increases resulting from the creation of a provincial police service would be offset by administrative efficiencies or, failing this, would not be downloaded to municipalities without their consent.

### Service Level Considerations

The FDP's final report indicates that the majority of those that supported maintaining RCMP service did so only based on sentimentality or concerns about the complexity of launching a provincial police force; not because they believe that the RCMP is providing quality police service in Alberta.

Unfortunately, publicly available data does not provide details on the input gathered by the FDP that indicated dissatisfaction with RCMP service quality. However, RMA and its members have frequently advocated for improvements to rural policing, including the need for faster response times to rural property crimes, more consistent processes for following up on and investigating rural property crimes reported by residents after they occur, and more focus on repeat offenders that target isolated rural areas.

While service levels and responsiveness continue to be a concern in rural areas, the RCMP (in conjunction with the Government of Alberta) has made improvements to rural policing in recent years. This began with the Rural Crime Action Plan in 2018, which included the formation of crime reduction units focused on prolific offenders in rural areas, the creation of increased police intelligence capacity related to prolific offenders and organized crime, enhanced civilian support to reduce the administrative responsibilities of frontline officers, and other initiatives. According to the RCMP and Government of Alberta, the Rural Crime Action Plan contributed to an 11% reduction in rural property crime between April 2018 and September 2018.

In 2019, the province and RCMP introduced additional actions, including the expansion of responsibilities of peace officers through the formation of RAPID Force, as well as other non-policing related initiatives. The RCMP has also added 76 new regular member positions (62 of which have been filled as of December 2020), as well as 57 public service positions (15 of which have been filled as of December 2020) directly linked to the new police costing model implemented in early 2020. While the costing model has significant concerns for RMA members (which will be addressed in the next sub-section), it does indicate that the Government of Alberta and RCMP can increase service levels by hiring additional resources under the current model. The issue with both the current model and a potential provincial police service is how added capacity is funded.

Clearly, service levels can and do change under the current RCMP model. The key outstanding questions are whether recent initiatives to improve service levels are adequate, and whether a provincial police service will take rural policing to the "next level" without further downloading costs onto municipalities. At this point, the information available on the potential transition to a provincial police service simply lacks this level of detail.

There are also questions about the extent to which Albertans are unsatisfied with the RCMP, as suggested in the FDP final report. In October 2020, the National Police Federation (NPF), which serves as the bargaining agent for regular members and reservists of the RCMP below the rank of inspector, used Polara Strategic Insights to poll 1300 Albertans randomly selected from urban and rural areas across the province on their perceptions of the RCMP in the province.

*\*(See ‘Introduction to National Police Federation to Albertans’ and “Alberta polling results re RCMP and Provincial Police Service” attached to this backgrounder)*

Seventy-eight percent of respondents in communities served by the RCMP indicated that they had “somewhat favorable” or “very favorable” impressions of the RCMP. Similarly, among those served by RCMP, 81% were “somewhat satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the service they receive. Among rural respondents, over 80% believe that the RCMP sets a positive example for young people, and approximately 70% view RCMP officers as accountable to the community, as having a personal connection with the community, and as effectively dealing with civil disobedience. Rural respondents are less pleased with the ability of RCMP to promptly respond to 911 calls, and also less confident that the RCMP has adequate resources to police its territory, with roughly 60% of respondents indicating satisfaction in these areas. Perceptions of the ability of RCMP to effectively deal with those experiencing mental health issues and in policing Indigenous communities was lowest, with satisfaction hovering at approximately 50% in both areas.

When respondents from all of Alberta were asked the specific question “Do you support the Fair Deal recommendation to create an Alberta police service to replace the RCMP” 29% indicated support. This respondent group, however, included the over half of Alberta’s population not served by RCMP (i.e. Calgary, Edmonton, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat). Among all respondents in communities actually served by RCMP, just 6% of respondents supported replacing the RCMP with a provincial police service, though a number (36%) supported maintaining RCMP service with “significant improvements.” Support for replacing the RCMP completely was highest in the rural north, at 11% support, but lowest in the rural central and south, at 3% support. Respondents from both Edmonton and Calgary supported replacement at a rate of 4%.

What the NPF polling shows is that although there are concerns with the performance of the RCMP in Alberta, the FDP’s argument that Albertans broadly support replacing the RCMP with a provincial police service is an oversimplification. Additionally, the general level of satisfaction with RCMP service levels in the NPF polling contrasts with the Fair Deal panel’s comments that those that support maintaining the RCMP do so only based on sentimentality or due to concerns about the complexity of forming a provincial service.

More discussion is required around how a provincial police service will improve service in rural Alberta. This will hopefully be addressed in Alberta Provincial Police Service Transition Study.

### Cost Considerations

The current Alberta-Canada Provincial Police Service Agreement (PPSA), which runs until 2032, establishes that frontline policing costs for RCMP services in urban municipalities with populations below 5000 and rural municipalities are split 70/30 between the Government of Alberta and Government of Canada. This equates to an annual provincial contribution of \$262.4 million per year, and a federal contribution of \$112.4 million per year.

Under the new police costing model, introduced in early 2020, municipalities that receive policing under the PPSA are now required to contribute directly to frontline policing costs. This provincial program requires municipalities to collectively contribute \$15.4 million to provincial policing in 2020, increasing to \$60.3 million in 2023. Cumulatively, PPSA municipalities will contribute over \$200 million under the police costing model between 2020 and 2024. RMA and

its members have expressed concerns with the model, including the fact that there is no link between increased costs and improved local service delivery or input into policing.

Aside from forfeiting the \$112.4 million currently contributed by the Government of Canada under the PPSA, there is a wide range of current RCMP or Government of Canada assets, infrastructure, and processes, some of which are likely not addressed through the current PPSA, that would become the sole responsibility of the province. These include but are not limited to:

- ◆ Staffing (both frontline and administrative)
- ◆ Training facility
- ◆ Development of training curriculum
- ◆ Forensics facility and equipment
- ◆ IT system
- ◆ Equipment (vehicles, uniforms, weapons, facilities)
- ◆ Policy and procedure development
- ◆ Legislation and regulation modification or development
- ◆ Indemnification

In simple language significant money would be required to purchase facilities, equipment, vehicles, and new support systems all at once in addition to a large effort required to set up a large new police force organization. Similar to service levels, the Alberta Provincial Police Service Transition Study may consider whether the benefits of a provincial police service will outweigh the financial strain that such set up costs would place on the province.

#### Jurisdictional Cost Comparisons

As a large-scale, province-wide shift away from the RCMP to a provincial police service has not taken place in modern history (the Ontario Provincial Police, Sûreté du Québec, and Royal Newfoundland Constabulary have all been in place since at least the early twentieth century), it is very difficult to accurately project the full costs of a transition. However, a recent decision by the City of Surrey, B.C. to replace the RCMP with a municipal police force was estimated to carry a transition cost of \$45 million, which has since increased to nearly \$64 million as the transition proceeds. This increase also factors in costs reductions related to a new IT system. An initial proposal to develop a standalone municipal police IT system was estimated to cost \$27 million. This has been replaced with a decision to share the RCMP's IT system – an approach that has never before been taken and will still cost \$7.5 million.

Similar discussions took place in the City of Red Deer in recent years, with city leaders ultimately deciding to maintain RCMP service. Transitioning Red Deer to a standalone police service carried an estimated transition cost of \$12 million with limited expected differences in the quality of frontline services.

Comparing cities like Surrey and Red Deer to policing Alberta is impossible. Complexities in geography, socio-economic issues, crime rates and patterns, and many other factors are more pronounced in a large and diverse province such as Alberta as opposed to two individual cities. However, the costs, concerns, and opportunities faced by Surrey and Red Deer are relevant to Alberta's situation and may require further research.

In addition to up-front costs, it is unclear how salary levels for officers serving on a provincial police force would compare to wages earned by RCMP officers and those serving in other municipal and provincial police services across the country. In general, RCMP officers earn less than their counterparts in most other Canadian police services. In 2017, an RCMP member earned 14.4% less than comparable police officers in other police services in terms of overall compensation. In 2019, a new RCMP officer earned an annual salary of approximately \$53,000. This is roughly \$16,000



less than new officers in Edmonton, \$6000 less than in Halifax, and \$17,000 less than in Toronto and Vancouver. It is likely that to attract new officers, a provincial police service would be required to offer compensation at levels in line with the municipal police services mentioned above, as opposed to the compensation currently available to RCMP members. Again, the details of how wages and compensation could be determined are not available, but evidence suggests that the RCMP is likely not an accurate starting point for a provincial police force.

The costs of a provincial police force are extremely complex, currently unknown, but likely much higher than the current RCMP model, both in terms of up-front costs and long-term costs related to employee compensation and ensuring that service levels are enhanced compared to the status quo delivered by the RCMP. Although the FDP report indicates that added costs associated with a provincial police service should not be downloaded to municipalities without their consent, the Government of Alberta has a recent precedent of doing just that in relation to the police costing model, which suggests that municipalities may face further cost increases linked to a provincial police service.

### **NEXT STEPS**

At this point, RMA's best guess of the next steps in the process for determining the feasibility of a provincial police force is as follows:

- January and February 2021: RMA and AUMA update their members on the issue to provide background knowledge and stimulate dialogue on this upcoming 2021 issue. Both associations seek member input on direction beyond positions taken to date.
- April 2021: PwC's Alberta Provincial Police Service Transition Study is completed. It is currently unknown whether it will be shared with Cabinet first or be made publicly available immediately.
- Spring/Summer 2021: Provincial decision as to pursue, consult with municipalities before making the decision to pursue, and/or add the forming of a provincial police force as a provincial referendum question on the October 2021 Municipal election ballot.
- Summer/Fall 2021: If this issue is posed as a referendum question, municipalities may field questions from residents on the issue, including requests for additional information. For awareness, one advocacy group that supports all the FDP recommendations as written is currently fundraising for a province-wide campaign to influence voters leading up to election day.
- Fall 2021/Winter 2022: If decision is made to proceed, the Alberta Provincial Police Services Transition Secretariat will establish an implementation process for the provincial police force, including how costs will be recovered, etc. The province must provide the RCMP two years notice to terminate service.

All that is definitively known at this point is that PwC Alberta Provincial Police Service Transition Study is expected to be complete by April 30, 2021.

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### **REPORTS/DOCUMENTS:**

1. Fair Deal Panel Final Report – Recommendation 14
2. National Police Federation AB – Introduction Document
3. National Police Federation – Alberta Polling Results re RCMP and Provincial Policing