

The Ambulance Plan

A life and death matter that can affect anyone on Long Island is the subject of the Nassau Transit Commission's fifth report published yesterday. We have long worried about the inadequacy of ambulance service in both Nassau and Suffolk. At last someone is trying to do something about it.

Medical people may gripe that a transit commission is not the right agency to recommend the remedy. We disagree. Under the chairmanship of Alfred T. Davison this commission has done excellent jobs of reporting on the Long Island Rail Road, the bus lines, the taxicab services. It knows the transportation problems of the Island more thoroughly than any other group. Emergency ambulance service is primarily a transportation problem. In preparing its report, the Commission conferred with hospital representatives, fire departments, the police, representatives of the Medical Society, owners of private ambulances and others concerned.

The proposed plan would set up a county-wide system of coordination between hospitals, fire departments and private owners so that the emergency vehicles nearest and most available could be called to the scenes of accidents with the least possible delay. The Commission recommends appointment of a Supervisor of Emergency Ambulance Service to take charge of the system. This presumably would be a delegated officer of the County Police. Calls for emergency service would all be routed through police headquarters at Mineola.

It is startling to learn that there were 10,029 calls for ambulances in Nassau in one year, and that Meadowbrook Hospital, with only four that can go anywhere at any time, handled half the total. That is to Meadowbrook's credit. It also suggests reason why the sick or injured must wait their turn to be picked up.

Equipping the cars with two-way radio, as Meadowbrook is doing, will be costly but extremely valuable. In terms of human life it is worth the price. The Commission calls it essential to assure complete efficiency of operation. If taxicab companies and other commercial outfits here can afford it, life-saving agencies can.

A public hearing on the Commission's ambulance plan will be held at the Old Courthouse in Mineola at 8 PM Tuesday. It will be an important session and should be well attended. Everyone who is interested in better emergency service should be there to support the plan although it is hard to imagine what would happen if 700,000 inhabitants of Nassau showed up, that is the minimum number who should be interested.