



Kansas RTAP Fact Sheet

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Developing a Transit Emergency Management Plan: Tips from the National Transit Institute

By Anne Lowder

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) seeks to increase safety and security for passengers and transit staff by having transit agencies establish risk management practices and safety training appropriate to the size of the transit operation and its management structure.

A best practice for managing risk and improving safety at your agency is developing a Transit Emergency Management Plan. The process was described in a workshop held by the National Transit Institute, recently hosted by Kansas RTAP in Salina, Kansas. This article will provide an overview of some of the key points in the NTI course.

Why plan for an emergency?

The first reason for planning for an emergency is to reduce the possibility for injuries and save lives. Other reasons for planning for emergencies are to minimize property and environmental damage, decrease transit delays, and ensure or improve communication and coordination with your community's incident management process.

All-hazards approach to emergency management

NTI recommends an "all-hazards" approach to emergency management, which recognizes that all emergencies have commonalities where the same processes (and people) should be called upon to respond to the emergency, regardless of the size or complexity of the emergency. This creates consistency and predictability in responding. Drivers, dispatchers, and management should have clearly defined response roles, and be well-trained for those roles. Management should not step in to take over others' jobs in the case of a major emergency.

Emergency response—from start to finish

Consistency in responding is also gained by applying the four tasks that comprise the Emergency Management Cycle—**preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation**. Together, these tasks can help a community plan in advance for emergency response, respond effectively when needed, recover, and learn from the experience.



Preparedness involves planning, coordinating, training and evaluating. In an emergency situation affecting your community, have you determined how you will work with other agencies or entities? Transit agencies oftentimes need to make themselves noticed by emergency responders. It is a good practice to develop a memorandum of understanding with various government agencies or other community organizations like the Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC), the police, sheriff and other first responders. Be proactive and to reach out to let these entities know what support functions you can provide in an emergency.

For instance, if your community experiences a flood, would your county emergency management department call you to provide transportation for evacuation? When that call comes, have you worked out a memorandum of understanding with that agency? Preparedness is seeking out leaders of those organizations with whom to collaborate during an emergency, and having written agreements in place.

Training your employees and conducting drills helps employees understand what is needed of them and how policies and procedures are followed. Your operators are front line employees and each of them needs to consistently respond

to an emergency in accordance with your agency training. The best approach to evaluate that your employees are trained appropriately is to have drills and practice emergency scenarios. Weaknesses can then be evaluated and training done to improve emergency response before a disaster occurs.

Response is putting into action your preparedness plan. Preparedness planning and training would have set up proper communication channels to the public, drivers trained in different routes and proper contacts made between different entities such as public works and local county or city officials. Whether the situation is re-routing buses or public evacuation efforts, the response follows the same preparedness planning.

Recovery. Recovery includes restoring your service and, then, improving your system based on the lessons learned from the emergency. In the situation of re-routing your buses, did your customers get the message about the altered routes? If not, what improvements can be made to get the message out to the right people? Did coordination work with other organizations, or is more communication needed? How did your employees handle the situation? Does more training need to occur?

Mitigation. The Federal Emergency Management Agency identifies mitigation as taking action now to reduce “human and financial consequences” during and after a disaster. As you develop your Emergency Management Plan you identify probable emergencies that might or will occur in your area. This is called the vulnerability and hazard analysis. Basically, this is a list of possible emergencies that could happen that are analyzed and prioritized from highly likely to less likely. For instance, what is your probability of a severe weather occurrence compared to the possibility of terrorist activity?

After an emergency you “mitigate” your Emergency Management Plan by asking questions during the recovery process such as how effective (or not) was communication or training? By identifying the weak links that were uncovered during the emergency, you can tweak your preparedness plan.

What needs to go into your emergency plan?

An emergency plan details how your agency will respond to an emergency. There are six components of a transit emergency management plan.

1) Guidelines. Guidelines include written policies addressing the life and safety of your passengers and employees. Also, included is your analysis on your vulnerability and hazards and written emergency response procedures that incorporate an all-hazards approach to emergencies. Another item under guidelines is to have written



This photograph from an emergency response exercise shows some of the different individuals and agencies that come together for emergency response. Your agency needs to be part of the conversation in planning for emergency response. Lead responders need to be able to reach your agency 24/7 if transit vehicles are needed for evacuation during an emergency.

procedures on internal and external agency communication.

2) Transit agency emergency management overview.

This overview should define your transit agency and the jurisdiction or area that you serve. It should include procedures for carrying out emergencies, a list of potential emergencies, the process of how you would respond to these emergencies, internal and external notification, on-scene coordination, restoration of service, on-scene investigation, debriefing on lessons learned, and reports.

3) Transit emergency response. Your agency should have standard operating procedures that define the roles of each employee in the transit agency and include items such as an operator's rule book and guide, policies, and employee roles during an emergency situation. For instance the general manager should be responsible for making sure that resources are made available so other employees can do their jobs. Dispatch might be responsible for assigning vehicles and routes and notifying family members of affected passengers and staff. Maintenance might maintain an inventory of vehicles and equipment that could be used during an emergency. Detailing and defining each employee's role steers that employee to proper training to handle any type of emergency that could occur.

4) Transit support for community emergencies. Transit is an important asset to communities that is often overlooked until needed. In your emergency plan, it is important that you coordinate assistance responsibilities and needs with other agencies, departments and organizations within your community. You need to know what they might want from you and you need to let them know what you are able to provide to the response effort in event of an emergency.

5) Emergency management training. If you haven't been trained to handle an emergency, when that emergency

happens, things might not go well. A successful Transit Emergency Management Plan will only be as good as the training you put into it. An emergency may arise and nobody will know what to do because they have not practiced. Use tabletop simulation exercises, full scale emergency drills and public safety agency training. Each staff member should be familiar with your agency policies, procedures, equipment and facilities for a successful outcome during an emergency.

6) Plan management. The plan must be reviewed, tested and checked annually for adequacy, feasibility, completeness and compliance.

Parting thoughts

Chances are good your agency will need to respond to an emergency. The emergency might be minor or it might be catastrophic. Either way, a written Emergency Management Plan creates the framework for communicating externally with other agencies and for how your agency will prepare and respond internally.

It is important to remember that transit emergency management is not “one-size-fits-all,” because transit agencies come in all shapes and sizes. Where your agency is located, the size of your service area, number of employees, and types of possible emergencies in your service area (tornadoes, floods, crashes involving hazardous materials, to name a few) will affect what goes into your Plan.

In sum, an Emergency Management Plan is an essential tool for your agency to reduce loss of life and property through working with other responding agencies. It builds consistency into your preparedness process and helps make your agency a trusted partner in emergency response.

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The Emergency Management Cycle, Put Into Practice

by Anne Lowder, Kansas RTAP trainer

Here’s a simple scenario for an emergency situation and what the emergency management cycle would look like for it.

Scenario: Someone falls on your vehicle This could be a serious fall or a minor trip. The cycle is the same, although the particular steps will vary based on the incident.

Preparedness: Your agency should have a policy that spells out how to handle a fall on a transit vehicle, and all your drivers should be trained in implementing the policy.

Response: The response follows the policy. What is your policy for handling that situation? Your driver will need to make a decision about whether to call 911. If the person who fell gets up on her own, calling 911 is not needed. If she cannot get up on her own, your policy might require the driver to call 911 rather than try to help the her up and risk further injury. In either situation, the driver must complete an incident report.

Recovery: Recovery would involve reviewing the incident report and following through with anything related to the person’s injuries, if sustained in the fall.

Mitigation: After reviewing the driver’s response to the situation, you may find that your policy is working well. If not, the policy should be changed. If the policy is sound but it was not followed, re-training for the driver might be required, or disciplinary action. Mitigation might also involve fixing the floor surface if it contributed to the fall.

Policies are key to consistent emergency response, and it is important that your drivers know them and follow them. In RTAP training, when we discuss what should be done in response to an emergency, some drivers will say “Well, this is what I would do...” But they should be saying “I do what my agency policy says to do.”

Sources

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