



APTA SS-SEM-RP-009-09, Rev. 2

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**Security and Emergency Management
Working Group**

Emergency Communication Strategies for Transit Agencies

Abstract: This document establishes a standard for transit agencies to follow to effectively communicate with their employees, the public, first responders, government agencies, the media and other members of the community during emergencies.

Keywords: communication, Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP), emergency

Summary: An emergency event may disrupt transit agency communications in unexpected ways. Agencies should prepare in advance by incorporating communications protocols in emergency plans and COOPs. This document provides standards and strategies to help transit agencies effectively share emergency information with employees, customers, other government agencies and the public.



Foreword

The American Public Transportation Association is a standards development organization in North America. The process of developing standards is managed by the APTA Standards Program's Standards Development Oversight Council (SDOC). These activities are carried out through several standards policy and planning committees that have been established to address specific transportation modes, safety and security requirements, interoperability, and other topics.

APTA used a consensus-based process to develop this document and its continued maintenance, which is detailed in the [manual for the APTA Standards Program](#). This document was drafted in accordance with the approval criteria and editorial policy as described. Any trade name used in this document is information given for the convenience of users and does not constitute an endorsement.

This document was prepared by the Security and Emergency Management Working Group as directed by the Security and Emergency Management Standards Policy and Planning Committee.

This document represents a common viewpoint of those parties concerned with its provisions, namely transit operating/planning agencies, manufacturers, consultants, engineers and general interest groups. The application of any recommended practices or guidelines contained herein is voluntary. APTA standards are mandatory to the extent incorporated by an applicable statute or regulation. In some cases, federal and/or state regulations govern portions of a transit agency's operations. In cases where there is a conflict or contradiction between an applicable law or regulation and this document, consult with a legal adviser to determine which document takes precedence.

This document supersedes APTA SS-SEM-S-009-09, Rev. 1, which has been revised. Below is a summary of changes from the previous document version:

- Changed from a standard to a recommended practice
- Updated references and added figure
- Expanded and modernized emergency communication recommendations, which includes but is not limited to, adding guidance on protocols for persons with disabilities, alternative communications technologies, and joint messaging with local officials
- Expanded training and exercise recommendations
- Removed appendix



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Participants

The American Public Transportation Association greatly appreciates the contributions of the **Security and Emergency Management Working Group**, which provided the primary effort in the drafting of this document.

At the time this standard was completed, the working group included the following members:

Alex Abdun-Nabi, *CapMetro*, Chair

Jill Shaw, *Dallas Area Rapid Transit*, Vice Chair

Robyn Austin, *King County Metro*

Marie Balak, *Hampton Roads Transit*

Mark Biamonte, *Toronto Transit Commission*

Brad Blackburn, *Sound Transit*

Marla Blagg, *AC Transit*

Aldon Bordenave, *Metro*

Sherita Bradshaw-Jackson, *Bi-State Development*

Neil Crosier, *King County Metro*

Fred Damron, *TSA*

Alexa Dupigny-Samuels, *WMATA*

John Greet, *OCTA*

Deepika Gangwani, *Toronto Transit Commission*

Matthew Green, *King County Metro*

Richard Herrera, *Houston Metro*

Darryl Jamail, *CapMetro*

Shane Kelly, *Hampton Roads Transit*

Lawrence Mason, *Hampton Roads Transit*

Chris McKay, *TSA*

Curtis Moses, *San Joaquin RTD*

David Moskowitz, *Charlotte Area Transit System*

Diana Rawles, *Denver RTD*

Chablis Salters, *MARTA*

Alexander Ubiadas, *WSP US*

Project team

Polly Hanson, *American Public Transportation Association*

Eric Halzel, *Eagle Hill Consulting*

Introduction

This introduction is not part of APTA SS-SEM-RP-009-09, “Emergency Communication Strategies for Transit Agencies.”

APTA recommends the use of this document by:

- individuals or organizations that operate public transit systems;
- individuals or organizations that contract with others for the operation of public transit systems; and
- individuals or organizations that influence how public transit systems are operated (including but not limited to consultants, designers and contractors).

Scope and purpose

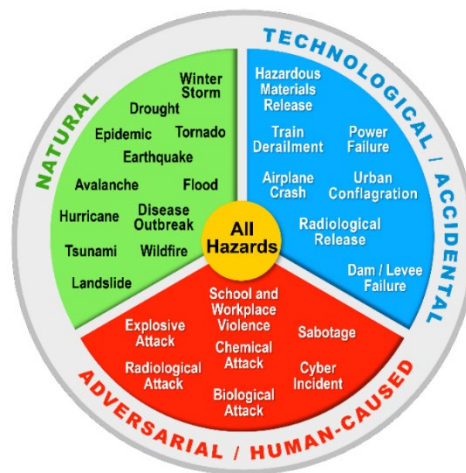
This recommended practice provides guidance for managing internal and external emergency communications. It is intended for use by transit agencies to establish or improve their emergency communication protocols. If government regulations conflict with recommendations in this document, the regulations should take precedence.

Emergency Communication Strategies for Transit Agencies

1. Types of emergencies

To advance emergency preparedness, transit agencies should incorporate emergency communication strategies and processes in their emergency plans. Emergencies may include natural hazards, technological/accidental incidents, or adversarial/human-caused events. Transit agencies should prepare communication approaches based on the hazards relevant to their community, transit system and operations.

FIGURE 1
U.S. Coast Guard's Depiction of Example Hazards



2. Emergency communication recommendations

2.1 Pre-event

Agencies should prepare for emergencies before they occur and incorporate the following pre-event communication recommendations:

- Enroll in priority telecommunication services (Wireless Priority Service [WPS] for wireless; Government Emergency Telecommunications Service [GETS] for landlines) to support transit agency safety, security, emergency management, information, and response personnel's ability to maintain communications during emergencies that can disrupt telephone service.
- Develop a quick-reference emergency preparedness and response guide for employees. Information should be designed to increase awareness of measures that employees, customers and the public can take to increase the security and safety of the transportation system.
- Have designated points of contact and/or distribution lists for employees (e.g., 800 numbers, email) via different and redundant technology that will mitigate against a single point of failure (e.g., an individual is out of the office).

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- Identify a point of contact for families to use to reach employees during extended emergencies. Transit agencies should consider establishing an employee hotline with a prerecorded message on the status of the office and recommended actions for family members.
- Establish relationships with local emergency management offices, operations centers, responders and emergency volunteer groups, such as CERT and other similar organizations. Transit agencies should confirm that volunteers are well-versed in agency emergency communication protocols.
- Develop specific emergency protocols for communicating with passengers, employees/contractors, first responders and others involved during emergencies or prolonged service disruptions.
- Develop and validate emergency communication strategies for communicating with individuals with physical, cognitive and sensory disabilities.
- Educate employees about the importance of emergency preparedness, both as individuals and families. Transit agencies should recommend that agency staff create family emergency plans that address communicating with family members during emergencies.
- Develop a database of employee emergency contact and next-of-kin information for use during emergencies.
- Inform employees where to go to stay informed about the status of the current emergency.
- Ensure that emergency communications are included in agency emergency plans and the Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP). Transit agencies should cross-train employees on communication responsibilities to ensure fulfillment of essential roles and responsibilities. For more information about continuity planning, see APTA SS-SEM-RP-001-08, “Continuity of Operations Plan for Transit Agencies.”
- Identify essential communications personnel and alternates by positions or titles rather than names of individuals in agency emergency plans and the COOP.
- Collaborate with local and regional security information sources such as law enforcement, the Joint Terrorism Task Force, fusion centers and the regional TSA surface inspectors for assessments of current security-related information.
- Participate in the Public Transportation Information Sharing and Analysis Center and the Homeland Security Information Network.
- Establish mechanisms to collaborate with local media, including radio broadcasters, to facilitate information sharing across the service area.
- Establish mechanisms to collaborate with local emergency management agencies to assist with employee information sharing via the Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES).
- Require agency public information officers (PIOs) to be trained to FEMA standards, to coordinate with other stakeholder PIOs, and to establish procedures for managing social media and traditional media inquiries or comments.

2.2 During event

Transit agencies should deploy the following strategies to quickly and effectively communicate with employees, customers and the public during emergencies:

- Ensure that transit agency points of contact (POCs) or PIOs provide timely, accurate, consistent and unified information updates, both internally and externally.
- Post signs, update electronic signs/messaging boards, and make routine public announcements emphasizing special instructions related to the emergency.
- Continually update emergency information in all facilities and revenue vehicles.
- Strategically increase the frequency of public service announcements, especially during peak hours.
- When appropriate, distribute educational materials to passengers in stations and onboard revenue vehicles.
- Communicate emergency information continuously (including in different languages) to passengers through multiple methods, including those designed for access and functional needs.

- Communicate protective measures via all available media, encouraging passengers to report suspicious activity via agency protocols.
- To the extent possible under the circumstances, communicate reasonable expectations (e.g., wait times for those onboard disabled trains waiting for rescuers).
- Instruct employees working alone at remote locations or on the right-of-way to check in on a periodic basis. During emergencies, transit agencies should minimize the number of employees working alone in non-public areas and increase the frequency of call-ins for isolated assignments.
- Ensure that all essential personnel are reachable via the agency’s emergency communication protocol.
- Brief staff and executive management as necessary on potential hazards and the protective measures being taken.
- Maintain alternative methods to communicate when other means are unavailable, such as fax, satellite, ham radio electronics, personal carriers, GETS, etc.

2.3 Post-event

After the conclusion of an emergency, transit agencies should deploy the following strategies to quickly and effectively communicate with employees, customers and the public:

- Conduct announcements regarding restoration of service via PIOs and other agency procedures. When relevant to the emergency, transit agencies should highlight post-incident activities, to include law enforcement and safety updates and recovery efforts. Transit agencies should deploy frequent announcements in transit facilities and revenue vehicles. Simple explanations of impact, current service status and other relevant details will reassure riders and restore a sense of normalcy, public confidence in transit service and resumption in ridership.
- Provide the public with useful information gleaned from internal and external briefings, in coordination with local and regional bodies and leadership. Transit agencies should pursue joint messaging with local and regional officials when possible.
- Consider establishing a customer telephone hotline or call center. Transit agencies can use a call center as a backup customer service/control center with multiple transit employees serving as operators, or deploy a fully automated system that provides recorded information and updates.
- Assess all aspects of emergency communication in the emergency’s after-action report, and document corrective actions.

3. Training

Training on employee roles and responsibilities regarding the agency’s emergency communication strategies is critical to everyone’s safety and security. Transit agencies should also consider refreshers and retraining for program participants when creating and implementing emergency communication strategies.

Transit agencies should deploy the following training considerations related to emergency communication:

- Develop and disseminate emergency response, communication, contingency and recovery plans or procedures to all essential personnel.
- Review with appropriate employees and contractors the elements of security and emergency management plans and personal safety pertaining to implementing increased security levels.
- Reinforce employee and customer security awareness programs, such as “See Something, Say Something.”
- Consider requiring or recommending basic NIMS training, such as IS-100, IS-200, IS-700 and IS-800, for essential personnel with emergency communication responsibilities to increase awareness on scalability and incident command structure.
- Consider mandating base, advanced and executive PIO training for assigned PIOs.

4. Exercises

Transit agencies should make provisions to evaluate emergency communication protocols during exercises. Transit agencies can assess internal emergency communication protocols via independent exercises and evaluate communication collaboration with partners via multiagency exercises. Exercises should evaluate as many aspects of an agency's emergency communications as practical (e.g., PIO functions, emergency notification call trees, public awareness messages). See APTA SS-SEM-S-004-09, "Transit Exercises," for more information on conducting transit exercises.

Related APTA standards

APTA SS-SEM-RP-001-08, “Continuity of Operations Plan for Transit Agencies”
APTA SS-SEM-S-004-09, “Transit Exercises”

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Abbreviations and acronyms

- COOP** Continuity of Operations Plan
- FEMA** Federal Emergency Management Agency
- GETS** Government Emergency Telecommunications Service
- NIMS** National Incident Management System
- PIO** public information officer
- TSA** Transportation Security Administration
- TPS** Telecommunications Priority Service
- WPS** Wireless Priority Service

Document history

Document Version	Working Group Vote	Public Comment/ Technical Oversight	CEO Approval	Policy & Planning Approval	Publish Date
First published	—	—	—	—	Dec. 31, 2009
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