



APTA SS-SEM-RP-015-19 Rev. 1

First Published: November 7, 2019

First Revision: May 27, 2025

**Security Emergency Management
Working Group**

Suspension of Service of a Public Transportation System and Recovery

Abstract: This recommended practice identifies suspension of service and recovery strategies for transit agencies to employ in the event of security or safety concerns, such as an imminent security threat, terrorist acts, major safety hazard, extreme weather, natural disasters or other conditions identified by the agency.

Keywords: all hazards, emergency operations center (EOC), evacuation, National Incident Management System (NIMS), operations control center (OCC), security, sensitive security information (SSI), system suspension of service, transit agency, unified command

Summary: This recommended practice identifies challenges in implementing a full or partial suspension of service, and actions that can be taken by transit agency employees to mitigate impact. This recommended practice provides guidance to help transit agencies manage passengers, employees, facilities and fleet during a suspension of service with or without advance notification. This recommended practice incorporates an all-hazards approach, addressing human-caused, natural and technological hazards.



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 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. 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 system'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-RP-015-19, which has been revised. Below is a summary of changes from the previous document version:

- Makes various clarifications and updates.



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Introduction

This introduction is not part of APTA SS-SEM-RP-015-09, "Suspension of Service of a Public Transportation System and Recovery."

APTA recommends the use of this document by:

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

Scope and purpose

This recommended practice identifies options when an incident necessitates some form of transit service disruption but does not address detailed criteria to guide decision-making, since that information may be sensitive security information (SSI). This recommended practice focuses on actions that transit agencies may need to take to safely and efficiently suspend service on a portion of or the entire transit system. This recommended practice does not address implementing a minor suspension of service involving a train station or bus stop, since that is a routine operation for most transit agencies.



Note on alternate practices

Individual transit systems may modify the practices in this Recommended Practice to accommodate their specific equipment and mode of operation. APTA recognizes that some transit systems may have unique operating environments that make strict compliance with every provision of this recommended practice impossible. As a result, certain transit systems may need to implement the recommended practices and practices herein in ways that are more or less restrictive than this document prescribes. A transit system may develop alternates to APTA recommended practices so long as the alternates are based on a safe operating history and are described and documented in the system's safety program plan (or another document that is referenced in the system safety program plan).

Documentation of alternate practices shall:

- identify the specific APTA transit safety recommended practice requirements that cannot be met;
- state why each of these requirements cannot be met;
- describe the alternate methods used; and
- describe and substantiate how the alternate methods do not compromise safety and provide a level of safety equivalent to the practices in the APTA safety recommended practice (operating histories or hazard analysis findings may be used to substantiate this claim).

Suspension of Service of a Public Transportation System and Recovery

1. What is a suspension of service?

1.1 Definition

For the purpose of this document, a suspension of service is the cessation of, or major modification to an agency's service. A suspension of service may involve removing or evacuating employees and passengers from portions of the system or the entire system for an extended period of time.

Examples of suspension of service:

- single or multiline suspension of service
- multiple station suspension of service
- modal suspension of service
- multimodal suspension of service
- multi-facility suspension of service

Events that may cause a suspension of service include but are not limited to acts of terrorism, extreme weather, major earthquakes, civil unrest, significant credible security threats and labor strikes.

1.2 Reason for a suspension of service

A suspension of service is a measure that transit agencies may implement under extreme conditions or due to significant incidents. While there may be different reasons to initiate a suspension of service, first and foremost should be the safety and security of transit passengers and employees. Transit agencies may suspend service if impacted by an emergency that threatens their ability to provide safe, efficient or effective transit service. Specific emergencies that may cause an agency to suspend service will vary from agency to agency, but they may include human-caused, natural and technological hazards.

1.3 Considerations for a suspension of service

During an emergency, continuing and suspending service will each involve risks and benefits. In general, a useful decision-making guideline is determining which option will do the most good for the most people. The primary benefit of continuing transit service during an emergency is to move people where they need to go. Major community inconveniences—such as business interruptions, traffic, impacted employee work schedules, missed medical visits and overcrowding—can be avoided by continuing transit service.

On the other hand, the safety and security of the riding public is the highest priority. In light of a credible and imminent threat or an unfolding emergency, the transit agency and its partners should consider whether the safety and security of the riding public is better served with a suspension of service. Before making a decision, transit agencies should consult with local, state and federal agencies (e.g., emergency management, law enforcement, transportation agencies and transit partners) to fully understand the environment and impact of their decision. Transit agencies should consult with local partners since a suspension of service will cause

traffic issues in affected jurisdictions. Transit agencies should discuss and document decision-making processes and responsibilities in advance.

Taking a too-conservative approach, such as shutting down the system when it turns out to be unnecessary, will have undesirable consequences, such as eroding the public's confidence in the system and loss of ridership. Conversely, taking a riskier posture of continuing transit service when a security or public safety threat is developing could potentially result in harm to the riding public and transit agency employees. Transit agencies should recognize and mitigate challenges by conducting real-time hazard monitoring and assessment.

2. Decision to suspend services

Transit agencies may receive requests to suspend service from the transit agency's internal activation and response procedures; from an outside entity such as a governor, fire department, or law enforcement or public health agency; or in coordination with several agencies, such as a unified command or an emergency operations center (EOC).

Transit agencies should identify and document service suspension planning considerations. Planning in advance of emergencies may mitigate uncertainty or confusion about suspension implementation. Basic planning questions that a transit agency should address include the following:

- What types of incidents or threats warrant a suspension of service?
- Who has authority to order a suspension of service?
- What process should be followed when ordering a suspension of service?
- Should one or more lines suspend service, and should it be multimodal (where applicable)?
- How should local, domestic and international security incidents influence a decision to suspend service, if at all?
- How long would it realistically take to identify an incident as an act of terrorism and react accordingly?
- How does the agency manage its employees and passengers during a suspension of service?

The following examples describe why a transit agency may suspend service:

- Local law enforcement or transit police order a suspension of system service due to an act of terrorism or imminent and credible terrorism threat.
- Public health authorities request a suspension of service due to a pandemic.
- The transit agency general manager or designee orders a suspension of service due to extreme weather or natural disasters (e.g., approaching hurricane, flooding, blizzard or earthquake).
- The general manager or designee, in coordination with local authorities, orders a suspension of service due to civil unrest.
- The governor or national authority orders a suspension of service due to a regional or national emergency.

NOTE: Agencies funded by the FTA may be subject to operating restrictions during a national emergency.

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An order to suspend service that originates within the transit agency may occur in multiple ways due to various hazards. An example scenario follows:

- Transit agency personnel make an assessment that a threat or incident conditions warrant a partial or complete suspension of service. Depending on the circumstances or hazard, transit agency personnel should consult with local first responders, such as fire departments or law enforcement agencies.
- The transit agency should follow established emergency operations plans for managing the incident. In situations that involve consultations or actions by first responder personnel, parties should establish a unified command structure.
- Once cleared to do so, the transit agency's PIO or designated personnel release information about the suspension to the public through appropriate channels, such as local media, social media, press conferences, etc.
- The agency's operations control staff direct bus and/or rail operators to stop service and evacuate to a safe location, following existing procedures.
- The agency's operations control and/or vehicle maintenance staff identify how to secure the fleet during a suspension of service.
- The transit agency instructs other employees, such as custodians, station agents and maintenance-of-way employees, working at affected transit facilities to evacuate to a safe location.
- Transit agency staff members or unified command provide regular and timely updates to executive management, local stakeholders and PIOs on the status of service suspension activities.
- Employees who have been directed to evacuate their work locations or transit vehicles communicate with their supervisors for further directions and information.
- Transit agency employees or the unified command verify mitigation of the incident or threat and determine that it is safe to resume transit service.
- The transit agency verifies the readiness of the system to resume service after performing an orderly inspection of evacuated transit facilities, equipment and vehicles.
- The transit agency begins a phased resumption of service as employees clear vehicles, equipment and facilities for service.
- The agency's PIO informs the local media of the resumption of service.

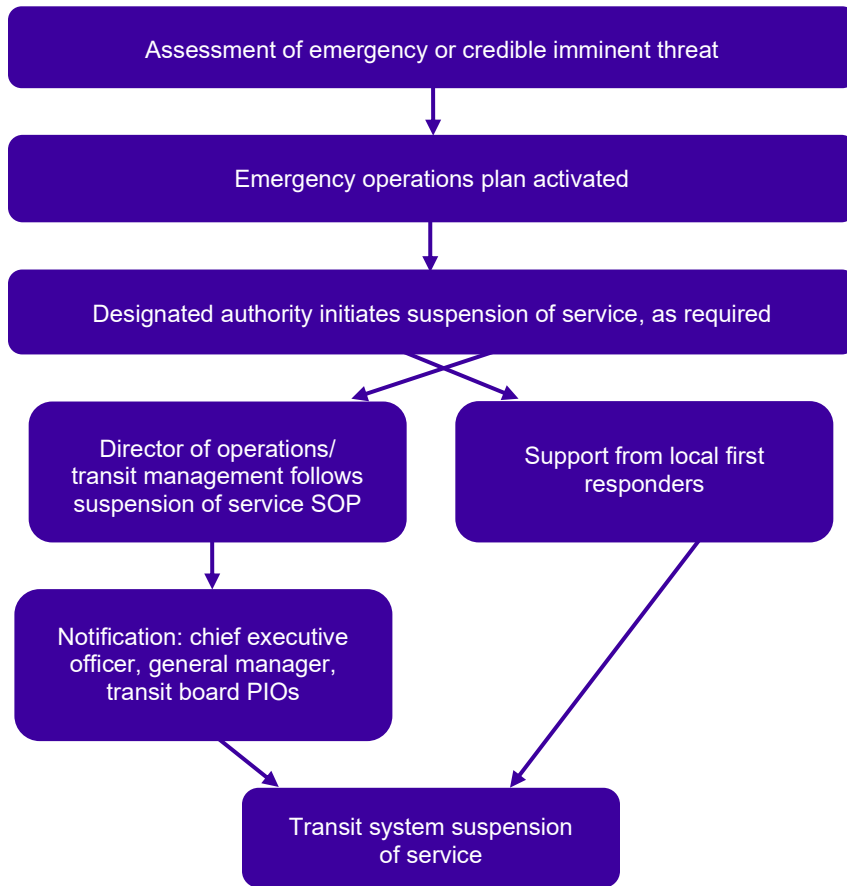
An order to suspend service from an external agency that has authority to do so may follow a similar path. However, such occurrences are rare and would be exercised only under extreme conditions, such as those affecting national security or public health.

2.1 Internal decision

Transit agencies should identify and document decision-making processes and authorities for service suspension in advance of an incident. Staff members with decision-making responsibilities should understand their roles and responsibilities. Service suspension procedures may be treated as SSI based upon the level of confidentiality needed to protect such information. The level of detail on when to suspend service may vary among transit agencies, but each transit agency should provide basic direction to guide its staff.

Figure 1 shows, in descending order, an example of how a transit agency may decide to suspend service. This depiction is not all-inclusive, and transit agencies should develop their own decision-making processes to best suit their needs. For example, the agency CEO or general manager may unilaterally make the decision to suspend service after consulting with transit operational staff, local first responders or emergency managers.

FIGURE 1
Example Decision Flow Chart



2.2 External decision

The decision to suspend service may originate from outside the transit agency, though an external order to suspend service would occur only in extreme and unusual circumstances. Nevertheless, transit agencies should prepare to proactively involve themselves via their senior management in order to ensure involvement in any major decisions impacting the agency, especially when such decisions have the potential to impact the safety and security of the agency's employees and passengers, as well as emergency responders. The transit agency, via its legal counsel, should identify entities that have the authority to either recommend or require a suspension of service in order to prepare for such an event.

3. Characteristics of system suspension of service

3.1 Planned vs. unplanned

A planned suspension of service provides the transit agency more time to prepare for the event. Such preparations may include protection of equipment, rolling stock and facilities, as well as notification to the riding public about the service disruption. Labor strikes are an example of situations when the transit agency has some advance notification.

Unplanned suspensions of service by definition provide the transit agency with little or no time to prepare. Unforeseen incidents may include a regional power failure, earthquake or terrorist attack.

Transit agencies should conduct and document a risk assessment of their systems and use the output as a guide to prepare for planned and unplanned service suspensions. See APTA SS-SIS-S-017-21, “Security Risk Assessment Methodology for Public Transit,” for additional information about methodologies to determine risk in public transportation systems.

3.2 Partial vs. full system

Partial service suspensions affect only part of the transit system, such as a rail line or bus route, while transit service continues to operate elsewhere. Full system service suspensions involve the entire transit system and pose more challenges in managing passengers and employees.

3.3 Modal vs. multimodal

Modal service suspensions affect only one mode, such as bus services, paratransit services or rail systems. A multimodal suspension of service involves more than one mode and will have significant impacts to the service area in addition to passengers and employees.

3.4 Facilities closure

It may be necessary to close transit facilities (e.g., administrative offices, vehicle storage yards, vehicle maintenance and maintenance-of-way buildings, bus transit centers or turnarounds, passenger platforms, park-and-rides) as part of a service suspension. Multi-facility closures will have a greater impact than a single-facility closure and will involve more coordination to manage facility and employee safety and security. Transit agencies should make decisions about closing facilities based upon an assessment of the emergency or threat.

3.5 Short term vs. long term

Length of suspensions of service may vary based on the situation. Agencies should consider the operational implications of extended suspensions, such as impacts on fleet readiness, staff availability or rider behavior, when creating their service suspension plans.

4. Internal coordination

4.1 Management of employees

During a suspension of service, employees should be notified in a timely manner to safely clear all people from affected facilities and vehicles. Transit agencies should instruct employees on actions to take both during and after the evacuation and/or suspension of service. Transit agencies should establish guidance and/or standard operating procedures on how to notify employees and how to instruct them on recommended actions during an evacuation or suspension of service.

Transit agencies should clearly describe and share employee roles and responsibilities during a service suspension. Procedures, roles and responsibilities may be shared in an agency’s Emergency Operations Plan (EOP), standard operating procedures and/or a training aid. Employee management considerations to document may include identifying the following:

- employees
- communication channels (e.g., radio, public address announcements)
- alternative transportation, facilities or lodging
- emergency supplies (including AED and first aid)
- emergency contact numbers
- guidelines for sheltering in place and evacuation
- evacuation routes and alternative gathering locations

- alternate reporting locations
- emergency response teams

For further information, transit agencies may refer to <https://www.transit.dot.gov/regulations-and-guidance/safety/emergency-management> for a self-help reference to assist in employee training. See also APTA SS-SEM-RP-001-08, “Creating a Continuity of Operations Plan.”

4.2 Management of passengers

Some types of service suspensions provide more opportunity for the transit agency to manage passengers, especially when there is more time to plan for the event or when the suspension of service is relatively short in duration. Management of bus passengers may be as simple as having the bus operator off-load the passengers to a safe location and stand by with them while the event unfolds. Similarly, rail passengers may be off-loaded at a station and evacuated to a safe location.

The management of passengers, including passengers with special needs, should be an integral part of an agency’s EOP and standard operating procedures. Some of the information the EOP or standard operating procedures should address includes the following:

- roles and responsibilities of management and employees (see Section 4.6 for more information on specific roles of employees)
- role of station agents and bus and rail operators during suspension of service
- role of other operations employees to assist where needed
- role of unified command in managing incident
- notification and update to passengers regarding alternate transportation if available
- notification to local jurisdictions that a suspension of service will take place
- external communications with the media and websites
- resources recommended by the U.S. Access Board (<http://www.access-board.gov/>) for general reference/guidance for transit agencies in the overall development of their EOPs or standard operating procedures regarding transit facilities and transit vehicles

See APTA SS-SEM-RP-019-24, “Emergency Operations Plan for Transit Agencies,” for additional guidance on developing a transit agency EOP.

4.3 Initial field response to a major incident

First responder assistance during emergencies may not be immediate. First responders may be preoccupied for some time with vital life rescue activities at multiple locations, and in some cases transit agencies may be left to attend to large crowds of evacuated passengers for some period of time. This situation could be complicated further if there is massive infrastructure damage to surrounding buildings, roads and highways. On-scene employees using the Incident Command System (ICS) should take the following actions if confronted with this type of event:

- Establish and maintain communication with the transit agency’s operations control center (OCC) or EOC if one is established. Report on-scene conditions, request assistance as needed, and gather relevant information on expected help and assistance for patrons under their supervision.
- Keep patrons informed regarding expected assistance, recommended courses of action (shelter in place or otherwise), and the options available. Agency personnel should not insist that patrons take certain actions, but they should demonstrate leadership by sharing information, providing sound advice and exercising good judgment.
- Identify people with special needs, and convey imminent needs back to the OCC or EOC for action.

- When assistance from response agencies arrives, transfer command and brief the new incident commander on pertinent conditions. Remain on-scene as the transit agency's liaison until relieved by higher transit agency authority.

4.4 Management of vehicles

Management of vehicles is an important concern for the transit agency during any suspension of service, since the vehicles' security may be compromised if they cannot be returned to their storage facility. Depending on the situation, it may be possible to plan ahead for when and how to securely store the fleet before conditions jeopardize the safety and security of employees. When there is little advance notice of an emergency or disaster, it may not be possible to return the fleet to the storage yard. In this case, vehicles may need to be left in place, such as on the mainline for rail vehicles or on streets for buses.

See APTA SS-SEM-S-001-08, "Continuity of Operations Plan for Transit Agencies," for more information about sheltering transit vehicles during emergencies.

4.5 Management of facilities

Managing facilities is closely tied to managing employees and passengers during a service suspension. If a decision is made to evacuate facilities, then transit agency employees, transit police or local law enforcement may need to assist. Once cleared of passengers or employees, transit agencies should manage facility security to keep out unauthorized people in locations such as subway stations, transit centers, park-and-rides and tunnels. On-street bus stops and at-grade rail stations typically do not warrant special security due to their open and accessible nature, unless a threat and vulnerability assessment or hazard analysis indicates otherwise.

Some aspects of facility management that transit agencies should address include the following:

- Evacuating passengers and employees, including those with special needs.
- Continuing to monitor security and safety systems.
- Closing, locking and securing facilities.
- Conducting readiness inspections before reopening.

4.6 Roles and responsibilities

During a service suspension, multiple transit agency departments will contribute to making a safe and orderly transition. The transit agency should develop and communicate plans to address employee roles and responsibilities. While this list is not intended to be inclusive, the following departments and outside agencies may have a role in a suspension of service:

- **Operations control center:** The OCC has the responsibility to direct the suspension of transit service, to include communicating with all affected employees (e.g., operators, station agents, wayside and facilities employees, field and road supervisors). The OCC directs operators on actions to take with their transit vehicles. The OCC also communicates with third-party agencies such as fire departments and law enforcement, as needed.
- **Transit agency vehicle operators:** Operators should communicate a suspension of service to their passengers, safely evacuate passengers to a safe location, and provide instructions and updates on the status of service.
- **Station agents:** Station agents should communicate a suspension of service to passengers and vendors in the station, safely evacuate individuals to a safe location, and provide instructions and updates on the status of service.

- **Field or road supervisors:** Supervisors should assist bus or rail vehicle operators with their responsibilities and interact with first responders as needed.
- **Wayside and facilities staff:** Wayside and facilities employees may need to assist in facility or system inspections.
- **Law enforcement/transit police:** Local law enforcement or the transit police (as applicable) should assist in the orderly suspension of service, which may include conducting security sweeps or a lockdown of facilities. Law enforcement will join a unified command structure, if established.
- **Fire personnel:** Fire departments will respond to incidents in which injuries and fatalities occur. Fire departments may also be on standby in preparation for a potential event and will join a unified command structure, if established.
- **Public health agency:** The governor or health officer responsible for the transit service's area has the authority to request a suspension of transit services when public health issues become extreme.
- **EOC:** State, city or county, and transit agency emergency operations centers may activate in response to a number of human-caused, natural or technological hazards. EOC responsibilities include monitoring events, communicating status updates to decision-makers and responding to requests for resources from the field. Transit agencies typically assign a representative to the state, city or county EOC to help coordinate response activities when transit is involved.
- **Unified and/or area command:** Unified and/or area command serves as the multiagency management structure that determines tactical decisions during an incident or disaster. Typical components include law enforcement, fire, medical and liaison officers such as transit.

4.7 EOC activation

Transit agencies typically activate their EOC whenever there is a suspension of service. Transit agencies should identify an alternate site in the event that the primary facility requires closure. See APTA SS-SEM-RP-017-23, "Planning, Developing and Operating a Transit Agency Emergency Operations Center (EOC)," for more information about EOCs.

5. External coordination

Keeping outside agencies and the public informed as much as possible will assist the transit agency in functioning more efficiently during an emergency. This section contains recommendations for implementing an effective external communication protocol.

5.1 Coordinating with other agencies

Transit agencies should coordinate closely with other agencies and partners during a service suspension. The more widespread the transit system service suspension, the more external coordination is required. To enable an effective response, transit agencies may need to coordinate with the following agencies:

- state and local government entities and EOCs
- law enforcement
- fire
- emergency medical services
- social services
- transit agency partners and EOCs
- traffic and/or transportation departments

For some agencies, it may be necessary to activate MOUs to receive needed support from other agencies. See APTA SS-SEM-RP-011-09, "Regional Emergency Planning and Participation in Mutual Aid."

5.2 Communications and public affairs concerns

The transit agency's PIO or identified transit agency employee should be well-trained in how to contact the local media, other transit entities, state and local agencies, and federal agencies (e.g., TSA, FTA, NTSB). When multiple PIOs exist from different agencies, PIOs should coordinate public communication through the Joint Information Center to enable consistency.

Transit agencies should communicate with the following federal agencies in the event of a service suspension:

- **Transportation Security Operations Center (TSOC):** The TSOC serves as the 24/7 point of contact for all hazards that cause or that have the potential to cause significant disruptions in service at any transit agency in the country. Contact information for the TSOC is TSOC.ST@dhs.gov and 866-615-5150.
- **FTA regional offices:** FTA regional offices maintain awareness for all hazards that cause or have the potential to cause significant transit service disruptions affecting any transit agencies or grantees under its purview. Thus transit agencies must inform their FTA regional office of any service suspensions. Accordingly, each region has an FTA emergency coordinator (EC) and at least one alternate who serve as primary information/communications conduits between transit agencies in their regions and FTA headquarters. Transit agencies should contact their FTA regional office to identify contact information for their EC.

6. Authority to resume

Once the threat or hazard that caused the need for a suspension of service has been mitigated or no longer exists, the transit agency's focus on resuming service will be paramount. The transit agency should have documented guidance on identifying who has authority to resume operations of the system, or at least identify the process to decide on service resumption. This may vary depending on the cause of the suspension of service. The decision to resume service rests internally with the transit agency, in the absence of health or safety concerns, and may include input from appropriate outside agencies. For hazardous materials-related incidents such as a chemical or biological release, other federal agencies, such as the EPA, may be involved in authorizing facility reoccupancy.

7. System recovery

System recovery refers to activities that transit agencies need to complete in order to resume normal operations. Transit agencies may phase system recovery over several hours, days or longer depending on the nature and cause of the suspension of service. Noteworthy activities transit agencies should complete before resuming service include the following:

- Inspecting and verifying systems, rolling stock, facilities and rights-of way for operability and safety.
- Confirming availability and transportation of employees to worksites.
- Confirming refueling of buses.
- Notifying the public via news media, social messaging and websites.

8. Training and exercises

Even though service suspensions may be infrequent, transit agencies should conduct regular training and exercises with internal decision-makers and employees, as well as external partners, to ensure preparedness.

See APTA SS-SEM-S-004-09, "Transit Exercises," for more information on conducting transit exercises.

Related APTA standards

APTA SS-SEM-S-001-08, “Creating a Continuity of Operations Plan”

APTA SS-SEM-S-004-09, “Transit Exercises”

APTA SS-SEM-RP-011-09, “Regional Emergency Planning and Participation in Mutual Aid”

APTA SS-SEM-RP-017-23, “Planning, Developing and Operating a Transit Agency Emergency Operations Center (EOC)”

APTA SS-SEM-RP-019-24, “Emergency Operations Plan for Transit Agencies”

APTA SS-SIS-S-017-21, “Security Risk Assessment Methodology for Public Transit”

Definitions

all hazards: Any natural or human-caused phenomenon that impacts the operations of a transit agency and/or its employees, ridership, first responders, etc.

drill: A coordinated, supervised activity usually employed to test a specific operation or function in a single agency. Drills are commonly used to provide training on new equipment, to develop or test new policies or procedures, or to practice and maintain current skills.

emergency operations center (EOC): The transit agency’s or local jurisdiction’s location where management of an emergency situation is conducted.

Incident Command System (ICS): A standardized management tool for meeting the demands of small or large emergency or nonemergency situations. ICS represents “best practices” and has become the standard for emergency management across the country and is a key feature of the National Incident Management System. For more information, refer to <https://training.fema.gov/emiweb/is/icsresource/assets/reviewmaterials.pdf>.

Sensitive Security Information (SSI): Information that requires special handling due to its sensitive nature.

unified command: An organizational structure established along National Incident Management System concepts to manage an incident or event.

Abbreviations and acronyms

AED	automatic external defibrillator
EC	emergency coordinator
EOC	emergency operations center
EOP	emergency operations plan
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
FTA	Federal Transit Administration
MOU	memorandum of understanding
NIMS	National Incident Management System
NTSB	National Transportation Safety Board
OCC	operations control center
PIO	public information officer
SSI	Sensitive Security Information
TSA	Transportation Security Administration
TSOC	transportation security operations center

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Document history

Document Version	Working Group Vote	Public Comment/ Technical Oversight	CEO Approval	Policy & Planning Approval	Publish Date
First published	Jan. 30, 2019	Mar. 1, 2019	Jul 10, 2019	Oct. 20, 2019	Nov. 7, 2019
First revision	Sept. 20, 2024	Dec. 3, 2024	Dec. 23, 2024	April 25, 2025	May 27, 2025