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Security Emergency Management Working
Group

Continuity of Operations Plan for Transit Agencies

Abstract: This standard covers the creation and implementation of the Continuity of Operations Plan.

Keywords: essential functions, operations, plan

Summary: A Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) provides a transit agency with a plan to facilitate quick restoration of essential functions after an emergency.

Scope and purpose: This standard provides transit agencies with an outline of the basic elements needed to develop a COOP. It identifies the purpose of a COOP, discusses the approval process, and lists the essential elements that should be included.

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 this is a conflict or contradiction between an applicable law or regulation and this document, consult with a legal advisor to determine which document takes precedence.

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Introduction

This introduction is not part of APTA-SS-SEM-S-001-08, Rev. 2, “Continuity of Operations Plan for Transit Agencies.”

APTA recommends the use of this document by:

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

Continuity of Operations Plan for Transit Agencies

1. Purpose of a Continuity of Operations Plan

The purpose of a Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) is to prepare a transit agency so that it can provide essential agency functions following a significant event that limits or restricts the availability of personnel, facilities or technical systems.

In many cases this is simply documenting and consolidating procedures and policies and, if there are failure points, how one continues to conduct essential business functions. The COOP is a specific component of a transit agency's overall Emergency Operations Plan (EOP). While the EOP is an organized approach to emergency management, including a concept of operations before, during and after emergency situations, the COOP is specific to the recovery and restoration of essential business functions or services. The COOP focuses on restoring limited operating capability, usually within a 12-hour period and for a period of up to 30 days. Beyond 30 days, it is assumed that an agency will have reestablished a degree of normality.

2. Approval of the COOP

The chief executive officer or other executive management of the transit agency should define the process for approval of the initial COOP, periodic reviews of the COOP and revisions to the COOP. People with the authority to revise the COOP should be clearly identified. The COOP should be a living document that is updated as lessons are learned and as new information is gained.

This process should be defined within the COOP itself, within the EOP or in other pertinent transit agency administrative documentation.

3. Identification of essential functions

The COOP lists essential functions and the resources needed to perform them. Essential functions are functions that enable the agency to provide vital services needed to sustain the industrial/economic base of the area, while maintaining the safety and well-being of the agency's employees and customers.

In determining the essential functions, an agency must start by listing its basic functions and then separating the essential functions from the nonessential functions. Examples of essential functions for a transit agency include fuel/power delivery, providing adequate vehicle and wayside maintenance, providing necessary communications, providing for employee needs (i.e., payroll), providing public information, and maintaining safety and security.

4. COOP elements

For each identified essential function, the transit agency shall describe the actions that need to be taken and the tasks that need to be performed. This could take the form of specific procedures, checklists, task lists or a combination of all three. In some cases specific procedures could be helpful in implementing an essential function. In other cases, specific procedures may be impractical, and a list of tasks along with reliance on individual ingenuity may be the best approach.

Successful implementation of essential functions is also dependent upon the availability of pertinent resources. Sections 4.2 through 4.8 describe resources that should be given specific consideration and should be addressed within the COOP. In addition to resources required to implement essential functions, resources needed to sustain personnel in the fulfillment of their responsibilities shall be considered.

4.1 Activation

The plan must identify who can activate the COOP and define a timeline. If it will be necessary to relocate, it should provide a process or methodology for obtaining operational capability within the timeline with minimal disruption to operations.

4.2 Alternative operating facilities

The transit agency shall identify alternative operating facilities for the performance of its essential functions for those locations that could be severely impacted by a plausible all-hazards emergency and plan for these to be available when needed. Alternative operating facilities should provide sufficient space for needed equipment and for personnel to work in a healthy, safe and secure environment. Additionally, alternative facilities should be identified so that essential services can be restored within a defined timeline and sustained for a period as determined by executive staff (generally up to 30 days).

As a practical matter, the agency should explore using existing facilities under its control to serve as alternative facilities to the degree possible. This might entail some expenditure in equipping facilities for dual use (i.e., facility normal function as well as alternative emergency function), as this is more viable than maintaining facilities that are used only in times of disaster response. Each agency shall determine specific alternative operating facilities based on its analysis of essential functions.

4.3 Communication systems

The transit agency shall identify the communication systems that will be needed to support each essential function, and plan for these to be available when needed. Consideration shall be given to the various links that need to be established. These links might include communications with internal departments, field personnel, outside agencies, law enforcement and the public. Based on response needs, transit agencies will need to acquire and allocate mobile communications equipment such as mobile phones and laptops. Additionally, in cases where an alternative operating facility may be needed, the COOP should address how communications will be made available at the alternative facility.

4.4 Employees/human capital

The transit agency shall identify the staffing needs to establish and maintain each essential function, and plan for these to be available when needed. As each essential function is evaluated with regard to human capital, the following elements shall be considered:

- Which functions are essential, and how many employees are needed to perform those functions?
- Which employees or job classes will be needed to perform each function?
- Which employees will be realigned from current duties to assist with the essential functions? Where will they be located and how will they communicate? (See sections 4.2 and 4.3.)
- Will employees require provisions such as transportation, food and lodging? (See Section 4.6.)
- How will the employees be notified? (See Section 4.8.)
- What preparatory training needs to be provided to employees who will be called upon to fulfill these essential functions that may be non-routine tasks? (See Section 4.9 for additional information.)

4.5 Vital/essential records, databases and systems

The transit agency shall identify the vital/essential records, databases and hard copy documents needed to support the essential functions, along with the appropriate equipment to access the electronic files, and plan for these to be available when needed. In addition to immediate operational needs, legal and financial documents and obligations shall also be considered. Appropriate processing and backup of vital/essential records and documents shall be maintained to meet the needs of the agency during and after the disaster recovery phase. Depending on the nature of the emergency, a transit agency's accounting department will need to accurately maintain financial records to acquire emergency-specific funding.

In cases when an alternative operating facility will be needed to sustain the essential functions, the COOP shall address how the necessary equipment, systems and records will be made available at the alternative location.

4.6 Additional resource requirements

The transit agency shall identify critical physical resources required, beyond those specifically covered in previous sections, to sustain each critical function, and plan for these to be available when needed. Fuel, electrical power, parts, materials, equipment and other similar items should be considered. In addition, extraordinary provisions may be necessary to support critical employees, including transportation, food and lodging. When appropriate, transit agencies shall integrate their plans with local and regional transportation agencies or departments to allow them to provide and share resources during an emergency.

4.7 Delegation of authority and order of succession

The COOP shall address pre-delegated authority for making policy determinations at the headquarters and field levels to ensure adequate oversight and coordination of the essential functions.

Additionally, the COOP shall identify critical senior managers and critical technical experts needed to implement and sustain each essential function. For each of these individuals, the transit agency shall identify one or more alternative individuals who will be authorized to assume the post, if the primary individual is unavailable, along with any rules governing the limitations and conditions of the authorization.

4.8 Notification and contact lists

The transit agency shall develop a notification procedure and maintain contact lists and notification call-down rosters necessary to implement and sustain the essential functions. The procedure for maintaining and updating contact lists shall be detailed in the COOP.

This might take the form of a cascading structure. The contact information for executive managers and individuals with primary responsibilities for implementing tasks within each essential function (along with appropriate alternatives) shall be listed first, along with a notification procedure to ensure that a chain of command structure is implemented early in the process. Each task leader, such as a department manager, would then implement the department-specific notification procedure to acquire the necessary personnel.

4.9 Training and exercises

The transit agency shall provide appropriate training for individuals who may need to fill essential roles and/or assume unconventional responsibilities within the COOP.

Additionally, exercises or drills shall be conducted periodically to validate the plan and to identify any gaps. In practice, efficiencies will be gained by conducting these exercises in conjunction with (or annexed to) other

emergency response exercises. COOP drills and exercises shall involve activation of alternative operating facilities and accessing of remote networks.

4.10 Devolution

Devolution provides planning and program guidance to ensure the continuation of any essential functions in the event of the loss of capabilities. Although this may be a part of traditional COOP planning, devolution may not apply to all transit agencies or functions and should be documented as needed.

4.11 Reconstitution

The transit agency shall consider what procedures, if any, are needed to resume normal operations. Consideration shall be given to how the agency will inform employees that the COOP is no longer in effect and to what instructions will need to be provided for resumption of normal services.

Related APTA standards

APTA SS-SEM-S-009-09, Rev. 1, “Emergency Communication Strategies for Transit Agencies”

References

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), COOP development, worksheets, examples and training guidance at <http://www.fema.gov/planning-templates>

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Definitions

Emergency Operations Plans (EOPs): Emergency Operations Plans should be written to include the incident command system and be NIMS compliant. EOPs should be reviewed annually and should be written in an all-hazards approach as to plan for a wide variety of disasters. The Emergency Operations Plan replaces the term “disaster plan.” An EOP is not the entire plan but rather the method by which the transit agency will function when an emergency is declared.

essential functions: Activities or tasks that an agency must perform in a safe manner, following an emergency event that limits or restricts an agency’s employees or physical resources, in order to provide limited vital services needed to sustain the industrial/economic base of the area.

Abbreviations and acronyms

- COOP** Continuity of Operations Plan
- EOP** Emergency Operations Plan
- FEMA** Federal Emergency Management Agency
- NATSA** North American Transportation Services Association
- NIMS** National Incident Management System
- TCRP** Transit Cooperative Research Program

Document history

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