



APTA SS-SEM-S-009-09, Rev. 1

First Published: Dec. 31, 2009

First Revision: Feb. 21, 2020

APTA Security Emergency Management
Workgroup

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 others 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 ensuring that communications protocols are part of their emergency plan and COOP. This document provides standards and strategies for sharing emergency information with employees, customers and the public.

Scope and purpose: This standard 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. In some cases, federal and/or state regulations may govern a transit agency's operations. In those instances, the government regulations take precedence over any standards herein that are in conflict with any such government guidelines.

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.

© 2020 The North American Transportation Services Association (NATSA) and its parent organization APTA. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form, in an electronic retrieval system or otherwise, without prior written permission of NATSA.

Table of Contents

Participants.....	iii
Introduction.....	iii
1. Types of emergencies	1
2. Standard measures	1
2.1 Pre-event	1
2.2 During event.....	2
2.3 Post-event.....	3
3. Training	3
4. Exercises	3
References.....	5
Definitions.....	5
Abbreviations and acronyms.....	5
Summary of document changes	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Document history	6
Appendix A: National Communications System contact information.....	7



Participants

The American Public Transportation Association greatly appreciates the contributions of the **APTA Security Emergency Management Workgroup**, 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:

Thomas Eng, LACMTA, *Chair*

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 Christy Bailly, <i>Metro Transit</i> | 12 Reginald Mason, <i>SNC-Lavalin</i> |
| 2 Marla Blagg, <i>BART</i> | 13 Christopher McKay, <i>TSA</i> |
| 3 Tom Brown | 14 Robert Melan, <i>TSA</i> |
| 4 Samuel Caron, <i>Metro Transit</i> | 15 Clare Muetting, <i>TSA</i> |
| 5 Neil Crosier, <i>King County Metro/DOT</i> | 16 John Plante, <i>Metra</i> |
| 6 Alexa Dupigny-Samuels, <i>WMATA</i> | 17 Michael Riggs, <i>MTA of Harris County</i> |
| 7 Rufus Francis, <i>Santa Clara Valley</i> | 18 Jill Shaw, <i>Dallas Area Rapid Transit</i> |
| 8 Paul Harvey, <i>VIA Metropolitan Transit</i> | 19 Lurae Stuart, <i>WSP USA</i> |
| 9 Sheila Hockel, <i>Bi-State Development Agency</i> | 20 Anthony Tisdale, <i>Federal Transit Administration</i> |
| 10 Ann Hutcheson, <i>Eastern Contra Costa Transit</i> | 21 Alexander Ubiadas, <i>TriMet</i> |
| 11 Mark Johnson, <i>Lane Transit District</i> | |

Project team

Saahir Brewington, *American Public Transportation Association*
David Hahn, *Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority*
Polly Hanson, *American Public Transportation Association*
Dennis Lytton, *San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit District*
Paul MacMillan

Introduction

This introduction is not part of APTA SS-SEM-S-009-09, Rev. 1, “Emergency Communication Strategies 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).

Emergency Communication Strategies for Transit Agencies

1. Types of emergencies

Transit agencies shall consider the communication strategies outlined in this document for an emergency with a view toward implementing these standards and incorporating them as supplements to their emergency plans as appropriate. Listed below are examples of some of the different types of incidents addressed within this standard:

- terrorist attacks
- natural disasters
- increased NTAS threat level
- passenger/employee safety and/or security issues
- mass casualty incidents
- catastrophic equipment failures or defects
- power failures/blackouts
- incidents resulting in evacuation/rescue from transit vehicles or stations
- any other incident causing major service disruptions and necessitating notification and timely, accurate updates to passengers, employees and the public

2. Standard measures

2.1 Pre-event

Agencies shall prepare for an emergency incident before one occurs. The following are some planning and communication strategies:

- Apply for Government Emergency Telecommunications Service (GETS) cards to help support the transit agency's key safety, security, emergency management, information and response personnel's ability to maintain communications during emergencies that can cripple the telephone services of an entire region.

NOTE: The Federal Transit Administration has confirmed that virtually all U.S. transit agencies are eligible to receive GETS cards and should contact the FCC's National Communications System (NCS) directly to apply/register for the service. Contact information and instructions for registering can be found in Appendix A.

- Develop a quick-reference emergency preparedness and response guideline 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 for employees (e.g., 800 numbers, fax machines, email), using different and redundant technology that will mitigate against a single point of failure.
- Identify a point of contact for families to use to reach employees during extended emergencies.

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

- Establish relationships with local emergency responders and emergency volunteer groups, such as CERT and other similar organizations. Ensure that volunteers and emergency responders are well-versed in the emergency communication protocols of your transit agency.
- Develop specific emergency protocols for communicating with passengers, employees/contractors, first responders and others involved during emergencies or prolonged service disruptions, including considerations for those with access and functional needs. Consider making modifications to transit facilities and vehicles as necessary.
- Educate employees about the importance of being prepared, both as individuals and families, for the consequences of emergencies and disasters. These preparedness efforts at a minimum should include an emergency plan that identifies the actions each family member should take if they are unable to communicate with one another.
- Develop a database of employee emergency contact and next-of-kin information for use during emergencies.
- Direct employees to be informed about the status of the current emergency.
- Ensure that emergency communications are a component of the agency's Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP).
- Identify essential communications personnel and alternates by positions or titles rather than the names of individuals. Include the information within the agency's emergency plans and COOP.
- Cross-train appropriate essential personnel for continuity purposes. This is done in accordance with APTA-SS-SEM-RP-001-08, "Creating a Continuity of Operations Plan."
- Collaborate with local and regional security information sources such as law enforcement, the Joint Terrorism Task Force, fusion centers, and the area 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.
- Collaborate with local media including radio broadcasters for sharing key information across the service area.
- Collaborate with local emergency management agencies to be able to assist with passing information to employees via the Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES).
- Have agency public information officers (PIOs) coordinate with other stakeholder PIOs involved with the emergency, and establish a mechanism for managing social media and traditional media inquiries or comments.

2.2 During event

The strategies listed below are recommended to assist transit agencies in their efforts to quickly communicate with employees, customers and the public during emergency events. All these strategies shall be incorporated into the agency's COOP and emergency plans.

- Ensure that transit agency points of contact (POCs) or PIOs provide timely, accurate, consistent and unified information updates, both internally and externally.
- Continually update emergency information in administrative and maintenance facilities.
- Post signs, update electronic signs/messaging boards, and make routine public announcements emphasizing special instructions related to the emergency.
- 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 activities such as, for example, the "See Something, Say Something" campaign.

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

- To the extent possible under the circumstances and via all available media during an event, communicate reasonable expectations (e.g., for those onboard disabled trains waiting for rescuers, for those waiting for the arrival of shuttle vehicles dispatched because of emergency events or stemming from major service disruptions, and so on).
- Instruct employees working alone at remote locations or on the right-of-way (ROW) to check in on a periodic basis. Minimize the number of employees working alone in non-public areas. Increase the frequency of call-ins for isolated assignments.
- Ensure that all essential personnel are reachable via the agency's emergency communications 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

- Agency PIOs shall conduct announcements regarding restoration of service. For example, a simple explanation of damages, what's operational, what's not, and reassurance that facilities/vehicles in service are indeed safe will help restore a sense of normalcy, public confidence in transit service and resumption in ridership.
- On a frequent and recurring basis, provide the public with useful information gleaned from internal briefings, as well as updates concerning operational status information.
- Use all available media to make frequent announcements about restoration of service, transit security and the transit system's state of readiness. Work to restore public confidence by reporting available ongoing and post-incident/recovery, law enforcement and safety information.
- Consider establishing a customer telephone hotline or call center. The center can be used as a backup customer service/control center with multiple transit employees serving as operators, or as a fully automated system that provides recorded information/updates.
- When a post-incident debriefing takes place, ensure that the effectiveness of communications is reviewed.

3. Training

Training of each employee's role and responsibility regarding the agency's emergency communication strategies is critical to everyone's safety and security. Refreshers and retraining for program participants should not be overlooked in the process of creating and implementing emergency communications strategies.

The following are some emergency communications training strategies to implement:

- Develop and disseminate emergency response, communications, 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."

4. Exercises

Transit agencies shall make provisions to test internal emergency communication protocols, either by independent exercises or as part of regular emergency response exercises to ensure that the protocols in place are effective.

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

Whenever practical, consider performing exercises openly in stations and/or on other appropriate agency vehicles or properties to remind customers of the potential for catastrophe and the importance of preparedness. Through PIOs, provide the media with press releases about upcoming exercises, and invite them to be present as observers for exercises as well. Be sure to have PIOs present to serve as liaisons for media members who accept the invitation.

The agency shall also periodically update and test contact procedures, calling trees, and notification and recall lists. Verify primary and secondary employee telephone numbers on an annual basis. Test public emergency communications plans, perhaps by using tabletop drills and exercises.

References

Federal Transit Administration Office of Safety and Security, “Immediate Actions for Transit Agencies for Potential and Actual Life-Threatening Incidents,” April 2004.

<http://www3.cutr.usf.edu/bussafety/documents/ias.pdf>

Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP), Research Results Digest 87: “Emergency Preparedness, Response and Recovery in the Transit Industry,” International Transit Studies Program Report, March 2008. http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/tcrp/tcrp_rrd_87.pdf

Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA), “Security and Emergency Management Action Items for Transit Agencies,” November 2006.

Definitions

Community Emergency Response Team (CERT): A program that educates people about disaster preparedness for hazards that may impact their area and trains them in basic disaster response skills, such as fire safety, light search and rescue, team organization, and disaster medical operations. Using the training learned in the classroom and during exercises, CERT members can assist others in their neighborhood or workplace after an event when professional responders are not immediately available to help. CERT members also are encouraged to support emergency response agencies by taking a more active role in emergency preparedness projects in their communities. See www.ready.gov/community-emergency-response-team.

Homeland Security Advisory System (HSAS): A system to provide a comprehensive and effective means to disseminate information regarding the risk of terrorist acts to federal, state and local authorities and to the American people and to communicate protective measures within government and throughout the private sector.

tabletop drill/tabletop exercise: A simulated response to a hypothetical natural or human-caused disaster.

Abbreviations and acronyms

ARES	Amateur Radio Emergency Service
COOP	continuity of operations plan
FTA	Federal Transit Administration
GETS	Government Emergency Telecommunications Service
HSAS	Homeland Security Advisory System
NATSA	North American Transportation Services Association
NCS	National Communications System
PIO	public information officer
POC	point of contact
ROW	right-of-way
SOP	standard operating procedures
TSA	Transportation Security Administration
TPS	Telecommunications Priority Service
WPS	Wireless Priority Service

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

Document history

Document Version	Working Group Vote	Public Comment/ Technical Oversight	CEO Approval	Policy & Planning Approval	Publish Date
First published	—	—	—	—	Dec. 31, 2009
First revision	July 19, 2019	Sept. 13, 2019	Dec. 3, 2019	Jan. 3, 2020	Feb. 21, 2020

Appendix A: National Communications System contact information

NCS Priority Telecommunications Service Center

- Phone: 1-866-NCS-CALL, or in the Washington, D.C., metro area: (703) 760-2255
- Email: gwids@saic.com

Identify a single POC or preferably a trained PIO to manage all internal and external agency communications. The primary objective is to help ensure that every person with a need to know within the agency maintains equal and accurate situational awareness from beginning to end of an emergency via an orchestrated review and subsequent dissemination of incoming information. All outgoing information should be reviewed for accuracy to prevent inadvertent release of certain information, such as names of victims or certain key facts that may compromise law enforcement investigations if released prematurely.