

Meeting Highlights

RESF 1 – EMERGENCY TRANSPORTATION WORK GROUP

DATE: Tuesday, September 9, 2003
TIME: 12:30 PM
PLACE: COG, First Floor, Room 1
CHAIR: Hon. David Snyder, City of Falls Church

Attendance:

James Austrich	DDOT
Gary Ball	Fairfax County Emergency Management
R. Burns	MDOT - Engineering
Lora Byala	WMATA
Rick Canizales	Prince William County
Mike Collins	MDOT – Homeland Security
Howard Chang	Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland
Philip Cummings	US Army Corps of Engineers
Gary Fuller	City of Falls Church - Planning
Brian A. Glenn	FTA D.C. Metro Office
Fred Goodine	WMATA
Doug Hansen	Fairfax County DOT
Al Himes	Alexandria Transit (DASH)
Dane Ismart	LBG
Joe Kammerman	IEM/DDOT
Grady Ketron	VDOT-TMPD Richmond
Kim Lieberman	Fairfax County DOT
Eric Kretz	Office of National Security, FEMA/DHS
Jana Lynott	NVTC
William Magers	NIH/Booz Allen
Eric Marx	PRTC
Deborah Matherly	Louis Berger Group
Paul Mayfield	WMATA
Doug McCobb	Transportation and Environmental Services, City of Alexandria
Elisa Nichols	BMI-SG
Tom Sachs	US DOT – Office of Emergency Transportation
Phillip Shapiro	BMI-SG
Earl Sharp	VDOT SEMD/TEOC
Sharmila Samarasinghe	Department of Rail and Public Transportation
David Snyder	City of Falls Church
Michael Spillane	NIH/DEPC
Alfie Steele	Montgomery County Transit

Bill Talbott
Shirley C. Williams
Alex Verzosa
Rex Wamsley

MEMA – Plans Division
FEMA/DHS
City of Fairfax, DPW
Office of National Security Coordination FEMA/DHS

COG Staff Attendance:

Andrew Austin
Michael Farrell
Andrew Meese
Gerald Miller

A G E N D A

1. Welcome and Introductions

Participants introduced themselves. Meeting notes from the August 18th meeting were distributed.

2. Discussion of Communications for Regional Emergency Support Function (RESF) 1

- **Update on the Regional Incident Communication and Coordination System (RICCS) and current RESF 1 Protocols**

Andrew Meese, COG

Trainings on the operations of the RICCS have been held at DDOT, VDOT, and MDOT, and training is planned at WMATA.

A handout explaining the workings of the RICCS “ETWG 9/9/2003 Item #2” was distributed. RICCS groups are listed on the back of hand-out. RESF 1 has seven groups. The large number of groups creates confusion. Mr. Meese suggested reducing that number by eliminating Maryland B and Virginia B, which are rarely used. Henceforth, to send to Virginia B, you would send to core group and note in the text that the content related to Virginia only. No one objected to eliminating those groups.

RESF 5 has been sending weather messages to RESF 1. Mr. Meese asked if the group wanted to continue to receive weather messages. The group agreed that the weather messages were unnecessary, since member agencies have other sources of weather information.

Mr. Meese suggested putting some RESF 1 participants into RESF 5 Information Only, or change to an e-mail only option, to avoid overloading pagers and cell phones.

- **Outlook for Transportation Systems Conditions, Traveler Information Exchange, and TRANSCOM**

Andrew Meese, COG

Another handout was distributed, “Draft Handout #1 – Concept of Transportation Coordination.”

Major distinguishing features of the transportation system are as follows:

- We are an interconnected system, with crises in one area spilling readily into others
- We are already “almost in crisis”, with capacity stretched every day.
- Transportation affects everyone.

The RECP sets out various methods of communications, but primarily we use text messaging and conference calls.

The objectives of the concept of coordination include:

- Enabling a timely sharing of transportation system information among transportation agencies
- Provide the ability to coordinate and collaborate on decision-making from a traffic and transportation perspective.
- Inform non-transportation decision-makers and emergency managers of their status of the transportation system and of the potential implications of the decisions on the transportation network.
- Support member agencies and jurisdictions as they provide information to be disseminated in a timely fashion to the public, to support a common message.

The success of the project depends upon: first, the availability of staff from participating jurisdictions or agencies that are trained in the communication and coordination protocols of RESF 1 and the RICCS, second, on these staff recognizing and designating a particular event as having regional implications, and third, on these staff having the time and taking the initiative in the midst of a major incident to “back away” from the immediacy of the event to initiate a conference call to alert other agencies and jurisdictions.

Experience to date has been mixed. In certain cases, such as the “tractor man” incident, there is a concern that the RICCS was not used as much as it might have been.

Mr. Meese suggested that the group consider the idea of an information broker, who would know who needs to know what. In the New York metropolitan area such a broker does exist, called TRANSCOM. TRANSCOM has existed since 1986, and it was originally intended to coordinate construction zones. It evolved to consider pulling construction zones based on incidents, and gradually it has evolved to provide for more real-time information-sharing between transportation agencies. TRANSCOM’s primary job is information exchange, and it relieves that burden from the operating agencies.

We are well served in the region with operations centers for each State DOT. But even in those operations centers information sharing is always someone’s second priority. Federal agencies could also benefit from working with an information broker. Transportation information would also be helpful to tourists.

A Transcom-DC would be a new and independent agency with its own Board of Directors. Every transportation agency that wants to be a member of TRANSCOM would have a seat on the board. Membership would be voluntary. In New York the money comes from a combination of federal grants and member dues. The budget is \$4 - 5 million per year and a staff of 30 people, to provide 24/7 coverage.

Mr. Snyder asked the group if we are doing what we need to do, and generically what we need to do to meet our goals. Do we think there is a need for some sort of 24/7 coordinating agencies? The tractor man incident exposed several deficiencies. The people involved in the incident were so occupied with the incident that the regional coordination never happened. The RICCs is good for sharing simple bits of information, and the conference calls can be helpful, but as a coordinating mechanism RICCs has some serious issues. The responsibility of that agency will not be to manage operations, but to make sure coordination happens. The public and press was not able to get accurate information during the tractor man incident. A TRANSCOM agency would be useful not just for major terrorist incidents, but for many transportation incidents. TRANSCOM will assist in the external relations of what we do.

Mr. Talbott of MEMA expressed skepticism that it would be worthwhile to spend \$4-5 million per year on a new entity. It might be better to take some of that money to improve the RICCs. Mr. Meese replied that TRANSCOM does more than occasional emergency coordination, they also own and manage surveillance equipment on the transportation system, and do a great deal of technology systems integration.

For the Washington region the cost would probably be between \$1 and \$3 million, depending on how much functionality was wanted. TRANSCOM is not the same as the I-95 corridor coalition.

USDOT has set up a 24/7 operation center. The USDOT representative expressed support for a coordinating center.

Mr. Sharp of VDOT SEMD/TEOC suggested that the existing reporting systems in CHART, etc. be linked into the RICCS. Mr. Meese agreed but noted that there is no staff or budget available for that purpose. Mr. Sharp expressed reservations about creating another entity.

Ms. Byala of WMATA noted that TRANSCOM tracks transit operations as well. TRANSCOM was useful during the recent power outage in New York.

Mr. Verzosa of Fairfax City asked whether the concept of coordination in the diagram on page 2 was working. Mr. Meese replied that that dependence on a series of peers is not working. For the operating agencies regional coordination is a secondary responsibility. No one is looking at the big picture.

Mr. Talbott suggested that we work on improving the protocols for coordination.

If the different departments of Transportation are not sharing information, they need to work out protocols for exchanging information. Once a new entity is established, it will never go away. We should look at specific failures and address ways to correct them.

Mr. Austrich of DDOT suggested that the DOT's work harder to make the RICCS work. A new entity, however, is not wanted.

It was suggested that TRANSCOM be made part of USDOT or a State DOT. TRANSCOM in New York started off as part of the Port Authority.

Ms. Byala of WMATA suggested that we try to improve the RICCS rather than create another entity. Any funds devoted to TRANSCOM would probably come from Homeland Security funds that might be available for other purposes.

Mr. Steele of Montgomery County Ride-On remarked that when the RICCS was being created he thought there would be some sort of intelligent direction involved rather than total reliance on peer to peer coordination. Peer to peer communication protocols, in his experience, tend to get dropped in an emergency.

Mr. Verzosa expressed disappointment that after two years of efforts the agencies are still not coordinating.

Mr. Meese summarized the group's concerns for the benefit of Mr. Snyder. First, that creating a new entity would be budget issue, and that it would self-perpetuate even if not needed. Second, that we should try putting more effort into making the RICCS work before we create a new agency. We might want to look at what was discussed two years ago, in terms of having the agencies designate people who are to coordinate with other agencies.

Mr. Snyder asked the group if they had the staff to take away from operations in an emergency to devote to coordination. Have the staff been trained to do that and are they under orders to do it? Have you arranged for public communications? Do you have 24/7 public communications offices capable of giving out transportation messages? If the answer to all these questions is Yes, then there have been problems with the execution. If No, then these are gaps that need to be filled.

Ms. Matherly pointed out that TRANSCOM works well in an emergency because it is used every day to exchange information between the agencies. RICCS is only used in an emergency, and that may contribute to the problems we have had with it.

Mr. Meese agreed, and added that we have many agencies such as the federal agencies that would benefit from a TRANSCOM. Everyday operations for TRANSCOM does not mean that people will be getting RICCS pages all day long. Just the opposite; information would be flowing into TRANSCOM from CHART and the operations centers and other entities constantly, but pages will only go out if the staff at TRANSCOM decide it is necessary.

It was asked whether the RICCS would supplant TRANSCOM. Mr. Meese replied that RICCS would not go away because it is a peer to peer communications system, not a staff or an agency. TRANSCOM would probably be one of the most active RICCS nodes. TRANSCOM would probably cause no more work for the agencies, and probably less, that without it.

Another possibility would be to run TRANSCOM less than 24/7 to save costs. However, with SmartTraveler, a traveler information service, operated 12 hours per day and the number one comment was the limited availability. Mr. Austrich said that operations centers need to be 24/7.

TRANSCOM serves the 511 and traveler information needs of the New York region, an area in which this region is lacking.

Mr. Snyder asked the group to provide us their thoughts on how to handle regional coordination, by September 15th. If not TRANSCOM, then what?

3. Review of Draft Emergency Transportation “Through Route” Maps Andrew Meese, COG

A hand-out and maps were distributed.

The evacuation route maps stems from the District of Columbia’s event route map, which extends to the beltway. Our charge is to extend the map to cover the entire region. For the District of Columbia, the destination is the beltway. However, for the region destinations are not well defined. Our solution is to think of our routes as “through routes” which can be expected to be heavily used in a variety of emergencies. They do not imply a particular origin or destination.

The urbanized area of Charles County has joined the region, so we have had to develop routes for Charles County. Routes in Virginia outside the beltway is a straw man from us. One criterion for routes is that they cross as little as possible.

The group was invited to comment and suggest changes. Comments are due by close of business on the 15th.

Ms. Byala asked if transit routes could be added.

Mr. Meese suggested that we post comments on-line in a password-protected area, to avoid duplicate comments.

Another complication is coordination of the federal COOP plans. The routes should be coordinated with the local jurisdictions. Mr. Wamsley of FEMA asked for a

representative from this group come to the next Federal Interagency COOP working group. Each agency has its own COOP plan, and FEMA is to coordinate the plans.

Mr. Meese replied he can explain the planning process. But we are still in draft; we do not have a final route map yet. No one agency in charge of the origin, the route, and the destination of evacuation. You will have to talk to representatives from D.C., Maryland, and Virginia, and it will probably take more than one meeting. The federal government should also think about its own priorities in terms of who goes first. Mr. Wamsley replied that at a minimum the federal agencies need to know what routes are expected to be open.

Mr. Meese suggested that we do some tabletop exercises based on different situations.

4. Review of Draft Situations

Andrew Meese, COG

Hand-outs were distributed.

Twelve situations are outlined. The situations are generic, and within any given situation you can create a specific scenario with a specific location, time, incident, etc. Our intention is to do three or four tabletops for specific scenarios. The outcomes of those tabletops are available to agencies to assist the development of their own plans. Situations are split into four broad categories: Shelter in Place situations, Selective or staged evacuation situations, full evacuation, and special situations.

Mr. Meese asked the group to confirm that the situations were comprehensive, and to ask which situations we should use in tabletops to advise our plan writing.

Ms. Matherly asked for comments on Handout #5, a mock-up of a scenario in Falls Church.

5. Update on Information and Databases Compiled for the Emergency Transportation Planning and Annex Development Project

Deborah Matherly, Louis Berger Group

Ms. Matherly distributed some draft maps and information.

We are planning to try to determine where people are likely to end up congregating. Mr. Talbott suggested that we expend the effort to plan for formal reception areas. Mr. Meese replied that we were looking to the emergency management community for guidance on the likely locations for reception areas or shelters.

6. Next Steps and Outlook for September

September 24th was set for the next meeting.

7. **Adjourn**