

Traffic Incident Management (TIM) is the practice of detecting, responding to, and clearing traffic incidents so that the flow of traffic may be restored. Ensuring the safety of the citizens of Alabama and emergency responders is the primary focus of TIM policies. Each minute that a primary incident impedes traffic, the likelihood of a secondary crash increases by 2.8% (FHWA, 2010). It is estimated that 20% of all crashes on freeways and 18% of fatalities on interstates are secondary crashes (FHWA, 2010). Reducing the total incident time is critical to reducing secondary crashes and fatalities. In addition, delay caused by traffic incidents has been shown to effect traffic flow up to four times longer than the incident itself (FHWA, 2010) (SHRP 2, 2014). This means that a 30 minute blockage can impact traffic for up to two hours.

Effective TIM programs implement policies that keep first responders safe and reduce the duration and impact of traffic incidents. A successful TIM program is a coordinated effort between emergency responders (police, fire, EMS), transportation officials, towing and recovery, hazardous material collection services, and the public through direct messaging or other media. Each group is responsible for specific tasks and coordination between all groups is necessary to ensure the safety of all parties. Effective TIM training and policies are paramount to ensuring the safety of motorists in Alabama.

Alabama has several policies and codes in place to support the TIM program including "Safe, Quick Clearance," "Move it, Remove it," and the "Open Roads Policy." These policies stress the importance of safe operation in the field. These policies are reflective of a collaborative top down approach to TIM from state, regional, and local authorities. Because of this collaboration, communications between the TMCs and 911 or EOC dispatchers is continuous and data integration is stressed at all levels.



Agency Responsibilities

Collaboration and Coordination between multiple agencies when responding to incidents is critical for the safety of all parties. Below are some of the responsibilities assigned to various agencies.



ALDOT

- Detection and verification of incidents
- Dissemination of traveler information
- Coordinating incident response
- Determine roadway repair needs



Law Enforcement

- Secure the incident scene
- Conduct crash investigations
- Supervising scene clearance
- Directing traffic



Fire and Rescue

- Suppressing fires
- Initial HAZMAT response
- Rescuing crash victims
- Arranging transportation for the injured



Emergency Medical Services (EMS)

- Providing advanced medical care
- Transport of injured when necessary



Towing and Recovery

- Recover and remove vehicles from scene
- Remove debris from roadway



Hazardous Materials Contractors

- Recover and remove hazardous materials from the scene



Alabama Service Assistance Patrol (ASAP)

- Traffic management
- Motorist assistance
- Preventative maintenance
- Emergency operations
- Work zone management



Alabama Service Assistance Patrol (ASAP)

Service patrols are a critical piece of a successful TIM program. Service patrols assist with traffic management during and after incidents to help clear congestion. Service patrols assist stranded motorists with services that range from basic to more involved needs such as first-aid, vehicle removal. Even basic services can become extremely hazardous on the shoulder of a high-speed roadway and service patrol operators have the training needed to complete these tasks in a safe manner. Service patrols typically operate near major metropolitan areas and concentrate efforts on access controlled highways. Operations of service patrols can range from peak hour incident response only to full 24/7 service. The operating duration and area should coincide with the expectations of incident management. Service patrols also provide eyes and ears on the roadways and are able to report on damaged infrastructure, roadway debris, and congestion not visible with cameras. Service patrols assist during severe weather events and special events, using their specially equipped vehicles to direct traffic. They can also assist with work zone management functions by temporarily closing lanes or providing other closure support as needed.



Key TIM Program Elements

The National Traffic Incident Management Coalition (NTIMC) produced the following list of key TIM program elements to support safe and successful programs (<http://ntimc.transportation.org/Documents/InstitutionalModels.pdf>):

Legislative/Administrative Authorization

Top-down authorization for joint operation and resource sharing will help keep the program strong and equitable for all agencies involved.

Strategic Mission and Goals

Clearly established mission and goals will help define the program and set it up for success.

Written Operational Policies

Provide clear guidelines for on-scene and remote operations leaving little to chance.

Ongoing Training

Keeps skills up to date with standards and creates a lasting bond between agencies

Dedicated Staff

TIM becomes established as a core function and responsibility of their role rather than a secondary activity.

Well-Defined Responsibilities

Solidifies relationships across agencies and limits any hesitation of ones responsibilities on-scene

Clear Reporting Channels

Patrols sections of interstate establishes a chain of command and ensures accountability

Dedicated Funding

Lessens the impact of budgetary fluctuations.