

Emergency Transportation Operations (ETO) provides coordination of response to emergency, non-recurring events such as catastrophic weather (hurricanes, tornadoes, wild fires) or malevolent acts. During these events, the transportation system is critical for providing evacuation routes, delivering resources, and providing emergency responders access to impacted areas.

Preparedness is critical to a successful ETO program. Once the event occurs, there is not time to develop and implement a plan. Important steps to preparing agencies for disasters include: collaborating to develop communication plans; determining evacuation routes; creating a clear hierarchy; assigning roles and responsibilities to departments and other agencies; practicing with all agencies involved; and determining measures of effectiveness. Multiple agencies partner to implement effective ETO, including: law enforcement, fire and rescue, emergency medical personnel, emergency management, transportation management center (TMC) staff, traffic operations staff, communications and media, National Guard, Homeland Security, and others as the severity of the event requires. Communication across state boundaries is also critical to successful ETO implementation; primary and secondary contacts with surrounding state agencies should be included in the plan. These plans should review the state as a whole, rather than individual regions to ensure consistency throughout the state.



TSMO Strategies Support ETO

Transportation Systems Management and Operations (TSMO) strategies throughout the State support ETO — the examples below demonstrate how critical collaboration and integration is to successful ETO.

ITS & Communications

During an emergency event, communication to ITS devices is key to understanding the extent of damage and response needed. Redundant communication systems are critical during emergency events where power outages and destruction of infrastructure is likely.

Traffic Signal Management

Using information obtained from a traffic signal management program will help the state determine the correct evacuation routes, plan and implement evacuation timings, and help with remote timing adjustments during the event.

Transportation Management Center (TMC)

TMC operators provide valuable remote support for emergency responders, coordinate between agencies, support traveler information dissemination, and can remotely implement detour or evacuation traffic signal timings.

Traffic Incident Management (TIM)

TIM is not the same as ETO — traffic incidents are categorized by higher probability and less severity where as, emergency events are categorized as lower probability and higher severity. During an emergency event, inter-agency relationships are critical. Strengthening those relationships during TIM events is as important to a successful ETO program as the plan itself. Each TIM event should be viewed as training for an ETO event. Reviews of major TIM events should be completed to identify ways to increase effectiveness and efficiency.

Emerging Technologies

Innovative transportation technologies can be used to send messages directly to vehicles or determine the weather conditions in the area by receiving information from vehicles. Continuing to seek innovative solutions to ETO challenges will support successful ETO maturation. These technologies also support commerce by providing updated freight routing around hazardous areas.

Pre-Event Checklist

The following steps are recommended by FHWA to prepare for ETO events:

Establish a Working Group

Regularly meet with all agencies included in the planning and response progress. Include private and public groups (Red Cross, AAA, etc).

Conduct a Needs Assessment

Perform a technical assessment — i.e. additional CCTV/communication needs, detour routes, additional staff, etc. Perform a broad assessment — i.e. development of training exercises, physical communication links between agency headquarters.

Develop an Emergency Operations Plan (EOP)

The EOP should be developed with input from the working group. The EOP should clearly define lines of communication, a clear hierarchy between agencies, and measures of effectiveness.

Practice with Training Exercises

Training exercises should include all members of the interagency team and take place at regularly scheduled intervals. Training exercises should be thoroughly reviewed to determine any short comings. All members of the exercise should be able to provide feedback.



Response and Recovery

The response and recovery from ETO events takes place in a time frame that may last weeks after the event. The initial response activities will vary based on the type of event and could include planned and mandatory evacuations. If and when evacuation procedures begin, evacuation timings should be activated to increase operational efficiency along the evacuation routes; TIM forces and Alabama Service Assistance Patrol (ASAP) vehicles should be prepared to assist stranded motorists; and the ETO communications plan should be used to share information with partners, media, and the public.

Following the response, the initial recovery process begins. During this step, DOT staff supports emergency responders by providing access or directing ITS equipment to prioritize information gathering in incident areas. DOT staff continues communicating with the public by pushing information out to dynamic message signs, 511 services, and social media. DOT infrastructure, including the TMC, regional warehouses or offices, and support vehicles should be utilized based on the needs of emergency responders or DOT staff. ASAP staff should continue assisting stranded motorists and clearing roadways as needed.

Once the initial recovery efforts have completed, resortration can begin. DOT staff should focus on reestablishing any lost communication and implement timing plans that focus on returning people home. Inventory of lost or damaged equipment should occur at this time as well. Demobilize staff as needed so they may return to their regular activities. Retain and review all ETO related documentation, including lessons learned.