

Fire and Flood Webinar, 4/26/17 – Notes

Read these along with the presentation slides. Text on slides is not duplicated here.

Mark Wall, General Manager, Lake Transit Authority, Lower Lake, CA

- During fire, main challenges were communication, adapting to closed roads, and staying on top of the fire threat and evacuations. A benefit of working closely with law enforcement and emergency personnel was immediate support for communications improvements and infrastructure sharing that had been held up prior to the fires.
- One of the things transit can do is help normalize life after a disaster. Lake Transit was only shut down 1 day and it was a goal to return to regular service as soon as possible.
- Some employees had to sleep at the transit office due to road closures, evacuations, and losing homes. Supporting them so they could support the community was important.
- Lake Transit offered special services for the evacuated staff and for those in shelters, including transportation to the local school or community center for people at the shelter (or anyone else in need) to take a shower. Coordinated with OES and FEMA logistics, moving staff around and controlling access to damaged areas.
- Funding assistance – call your state DOT *right away* (and FTA regional office, too) about FTA Emergency Assistance, to continue operations or do special routes/services, etc.
- Offered free fares for 45 days throughout system. People often didn't have their wallets or money due to evacuation or homes burned down. Because of the higher utilization during the disaster, annual trip numbers did not go down so funding was not impacted.
- They offered a supplemental rate and wage increase to their staff -- important because there is often increased competition for work, due to high labor demand and fewer people. They did a survey of 22 transits in CA and 30% said staff was an issue after a disaster.
- Assigning a field representative is very helpful for assisting your community and hearing about their challenges and needs. Lake Transit's field rep was their new mobility manager, which was a very good fit. The role was to be on the ground in the affected communities and assist coordinating resources and transportation.
- Recovering from disasters is a long process and is challenging for the community.
- Import to have good transmitters, repeaters, etc., for communication during emergencies.

Kelly Scaff, CEO/General Manager, Okanogan County Transit Authority, Omak, WA

- Overview of Okanogan region, geography, and fires in 2014 and 2015.
- Okanogan County Transit Authority created in July 2014.
- They identified "safe cities" in the area, but it was ever changing. With fires changing wind conditions made formerly "safe cities" unsafe and they had to close access in communities.
- Coordinating communication with employees and emergency responders was important for staying on top of changing conditions and deploying equipment.
- For fire emergencies, even indoor air quality was affected by smoke. Air filtration and

- masks were needed and throat lozenges, etc. Keeping staff safe was a priority.
- When communications became unreliable, they had to share responsibility. Kelly delegated authority to her managers and staff to make decisions and act in good faith to support disaster response and help people in the community. Vehicles were moved and staged to stay safe and provide support through out the fire area.
- After the emergency, the approval to create interlocal agreements with Okanogan County Emergency Management was passed laying out roles and expectations during emergencies, for the future. Those agreements are still being finalized.
- Interlocal agreements are required to get reimbursed when providing special transportation.
- Also, the Council of Governments is looking at ingress/egress routes, for more exits, evacuation options, and road improvements.
- One ongoing challenge is lack of housing in the area and thus long distances for staff.
- Other challenges include flooding and landslide risk, and dead trees blocking roads.
- Sometimes calls didn't go through, making it very hard to communicate, but sometimes texts would and sometimes the local emergency management call list system did go through - important to coordinate with them to get out urgent messages. Satellite phones are an idea, too.

Don Chartock, Project Delivery Manager, Public Transportation Division, Washington State DOT

- Important to remember that people with special needs are not always prioritized in emergencies. Emergency response is triage and the communities, transit providers, and state need to plan in advance and fill in the gaps to stay on top of the needs of people with disabilities, etc.
- Critical to inventory all assets available for help during/after emergencies, communicate, and make sure that an asset is not already dedicated to another task (e.g. park and ride lot assigned for both evacuation parking, vehicle staging, makeshift shelters, etc. - it can't serve all of those purposes at once).
- WSDOT requires emergency management section of HST plans to force coordination and emergency planning.
- Revising MOUs and/or refreshing their memories is important, as staff turns over or people forget, this way fresh in mind for when emergencies occur.
- Good opportunity to become apart of your local COAD group (Community Organizations Active in Disaster).
- To keep on top of people with disabilities, one agency in WA divides up people in community to be in touch with as part of community action agency plan (e.g. people on dialysis at home, especially for when power goes out).

Jamie Ainsworth, Public Transit Assistant Director, Louisiana Department of Transportation & Development

- They contracted bus services with Hotard for one month for transport to/from affected areas, and especially for employment.
- There is a contractual expectation in their 5311/5310 grants for transits to work with and have agreements with local emergency preparedness coordinators, so it is built in.
- The safe place in a disaster will change - depending on flood waters and fires, etc. Need to identify various safe places for people and vehicles and be ready to move/adjust.
- Even the best laid plans need to be flexible.
- Have to try to help prepare people for isolation after an emergency - having medications at home, talking to neighbors, knowing who is especially at risk if power goes out (at home dialysis patients, etc.). Also, communication with human services agencies, etc.