

METRO Plans for Storm Response

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Introduction

The Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County, also known as Houston METRO, serves a vital role in regional public transportation services. Our mission is to provide safe, clean, reliable, accessible, and friendly public transportation services to our region. As public servants, we have a deep responsibility to not only provide transit services during regular blue skies but to ensure the continuity of our operations after hurricanes and tropical weather. Today, I will briefly discuss topics such as tropical weather preparedness, loss mitigation, rapid recovery, and how we support coastal protections.

Objectives

To provide attendees an introduction to Houston METRO's plans for emergency weather response. To provide a snapshot of our continuity of operations planning. As well as, a brief description of our community contributions, as a public service, during emergency activation.

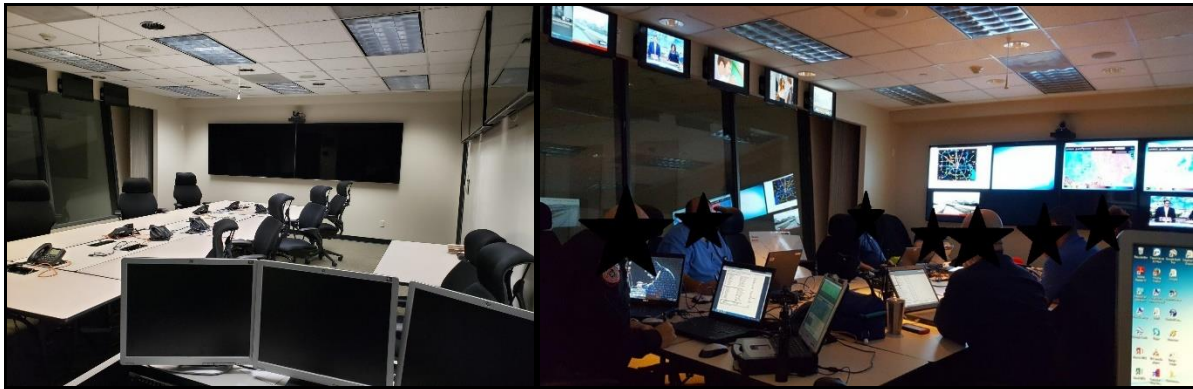
Preparedness

METRO utilizes a detailed Emergency Management Plan (EMP) to ensure authority preparedness and continuity through any all-hazards event. We can't predict the future, but we can plan for many likely and a few unlikely scenarios. These can range from weather phenomena like flooding or hurricanes to special affairs such as local rodeo, major sports events, and professional conferences. While updating this plan, we various departments for input, accuracy, practicality, and feasibility; however, we make sure to follow guidelines set by FEMA and best practices by U.S.DOT. The EMP also notes which tier level employees must respond during emergencies, and it lays out some of the additional special tasks that may be required of employees to accomplish METRO's regional transportation goals. Time permitting, these employees are given the opportunity to go home before an impending hurricane to prep their families, homes, and take care of necessary matters. Then, our dedicated people return to do what they can for the communities they live in.

METRO has numerous emergency programs designed to give us a fighting chance going into a disaster, they include employee food and water distribution, pre-storm fuel delivery, high-water vehicle Teams, and storm messaging through our marketing and social media teams. Some might argue the latter isn't technically an emergency program but the social media team in action during an emergency event is astounding as they work diligently to disseminate accurate information versus the ever-present rumor mongering.

METRO is also one of four agency partners who came together in 1993 to form

Houston TranStar, the traffic and emergency management center located in Houston, Texas. In fact, our METRO Emergency Operations Center (EOC) is located at Houston TranStar and is prepared to activate for catastrophic weather, some special events, and unexpected disaster. We follow best practices for our EOC, and active members include internal METRO departments. The EOC team coordinates with both internal and outside partners to ensure the strongest regional response and recovery. While our EOC is activated we have METRO representatives assigned to the Harris County EOC and the City of Houston Emergency Center.



Loss Mitigation

Houston METRO Planning & Operations worked together to fine-tune how we run and stop service to promote rider & employee safety and reduce the very likely chances of lost or damaged METRO equipment during an emergency. What does that mean? We previously supported the philosophy, if we got you to a location, we must get you home and often ran service until the last few hours before a storm. However, by stopping service earlier and by communicating with the public and partners more often, we've experienced tremendous community support and have reduced financial loss to our costly bus fleet. By having fewer flooded buses, we've reduced our negative headlines in the news. Taxpayers have entrusted METRO to make wise choices regarding our bus, rail, paratransit fleets and we take it seriously.

Our facilities maintenance team has an aggressive storm mitigation program involving annual inspections, trainings, and a tropical weather meeting held weekly during hurricane season for managers and supervisors. Our bus barns, rail yards, and other support facilities are a major part of METRO getting back into the action quickly after a major catastrophe and their reliability is key to METRO's continuity of operations

Preparing our facilities for a potential hurricane is only one part of the equation. Given improvements to storm tracking and the allowance of more lead time, we utilize that time to safely move our equipment appropriately per the given circumstances. During Hurricane Harvey, we made national headlines with our creative solution to highwater. Most people didn't realize the plan to park buses on HOV overpasses was planned over twenty years, Harvey was our first opportunity to try it out.



Rapid Recovery

The flip side of shutting down transit services early to support loss mitigation, is being prepared to enact a rapid recovery of services after the storm has passed. We've realigned our capabilities to enable METRO to have all essential service functions in movement shortly after tropical weather has subsided. That doesn't mean service will start immediately but our support operations will be engaged. Once the storm passes, we have Tier I employees based at all major facilities to begin clearing buses for street use, other employees are designated to begin clearing the core bus routes of debris and hazards, our bus operators will be assigned to drive school or transit buses depending on the need, and bus and rail maintenance staff will safeguard work areas to begin maintenance operations. To further support a rapid recovery of services, METRO utilizes a Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) to ensure mission essential functions keep going after a disaster. Our COOP is updated annually and provides a valuable framework and delegation of authority.

Coastal Protection

METRO has teamed up with the City of Houston and Harris County to support a Major State of Texas Emergency Assistance Registry (STEARs) Hurricane Evacuation for designated coastal & near coastal zip codes. Additionally, METRO has been given access to the City of Houston's 311 online case management system to further assist evacuating citizens who call their helpline looking for transportation assistance within our service area. Once the decision to evacuate has been made by elected officials, METRO will always be here to support the public and our regional partners.