

## 7.0 - Communications

Emergency communications are facilitated through the use of a common plan. Using an integrated approach links the operation and support units of SDOT, other City departments and partner agencies.

Communications covers two fields:

- Public information corresponds with the media and other sources to broadcast messages to the community.
- Internal communications includes protocols to manage the incident and inform and engage responders.

When SDOT is the lead agency, the Incident Commander is the most capable individual available (see *National Incident Management System*, Appendix A, The Incident Command System). The Incident Commander either appoints an Information Officer as an element of his/her Command Staff or takes responsibility for the public information functions. The Information Officer handles all media inquiries and coordinates the release of information to the media with the Public Affairs Officer at the EOC.

When SDOT is not the lead agency, the Incident Commander comes from the department or agency (or in the case of Unified Command the combination of agencies) with authority over the incident. SDOT assists as needed.

The following is an excerpt from the City's *Disaster Readiness & Response Plan, Annex for ESF-5, Public Information*. Full text of ESF-5 Annex, "Section IV, Concept of Operations" is included in Appendix A.

In the event of an emergency prompting activation of the EOC, the City of Seattle's PIOs, under the direction of the Mayor's Communications Director, carry out all aspects of the Emergency Public Information Function. The EOC is the primary site and source of emergency public information from the City of Seattle to the public and City employees, through a variety of communications channels.

The Mayor's Office is the primary agency, with the Mayor's Director of Communications being the Emergency Support Function-5 (ESF-5) Coordinator. When the Emergency Public Information (EPI) function is activated, the Director of Communications will call on any, or all, city Public Information Officers, and other key support staff, to carry out the function.

No matter what the situation is, two-way communication with WSDOT will occur and messages will be coordinated. The following section first describes the steps SDOT will take and messages it will disseminate, and the second part discusses WSDOT's communication plan.

### **SDOT'S DISASTER/EMERGENCY PUBLIC INFORMATION PLAN AND EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS PLAN**

Carrying 25 percent of traffic moving north-south through downtown (over 100,000 vehicles a day), the role of the Viaduct in Seattle and the region's transportation system is critical. Natural disasters have damaged the Viaduct and Seawall to the point that one or both could fail if a major earthquake strikes.

This communication plan supplements the Seattle Department of Transportation's *Emergency Operations Plan* and the *Seattle Disaster Readiness & Response Plans*, facilitating the protection of lives, property and speedy restoration of transportation service along SR 99 and adjacent arterials. There are two conditions of closure in which this plan might be used: planned and unplanned closures to the Viaduct. Further, there are four types of scenarios where using the communication plan would be appropriate:

1. Complete closure of the Alaskan Way Viaduct and surface Alaskan Way
2. Complete closure of the Alaskan Way Viaduct, with surface Alaskan Way open
3. Traffic incident-based temporary closure of the Alaskan Way Viaduct
4. Additional weight restrictions on the Alaskan Way Viaduct

These and other issues require a comprehensive and flexible communication plan. This plan seeks to provide guidance and direction during an emergency by suggesting tools and messages for internal and external communications while balancing a variety of needs.

The communication plan should be reviewed and exercised periodically and revised as necessary to meet changing conditions and the Emergency Management Division of the Seattle Police Department briefed on revisions.

### **Communication Objectives**

No one can completely predict what tools will be available to communicate updates, detour routes, and transportation options in the event of an emergency. However, good plans carried out by knowledgeable and well-trained staff can minimize confusion. The communication plan is designed to be used by WSDOT and SDOT personnel, and reflects feedback from King County Metro Transit and other jurisdictions' emergency plans. However, in the event of an emergency or disaster occurring in or affecting the City of Seattle, one which requires the activation of the EOC, the Emergency Public Information Function (ESF-5) is activated and all communications will be disseminated through the ESF-5.

The purpose of this plan and its recommendations is to:

- Incorporate and coordinate communication between local, regional, state, and federal personnel
- Create an efficient organization capable of responding to the emergency
- Communicate to the community:
  - damage assessment data
  - information on how to move around and through downtown Seattle
  - actions being taken
  - status of service restoration

### **Audience**

Because the Viaduct is used by a large number of travelers, information must be broadly distributed. During the first 24 hours of an earthquake, downtown could see a significant increase in automobiles on some surface roads; as a result, emergency vehicles, transit, and freight could be slowed significantly. An already congested I-5 would likely be squeezed to its limits because of its close proximity to SR 99. To add to the confusion, an earthquake could topple fragile buildings, tear up roads and shut down utilities. No one can know where specific disruptions would occur. The following list identifies various audiences that must be considered in communications.

#### Local, Regional, State and Federal Transportation Decision Makers and Communication Supervisors

Decision makers from each agency must be identified. People who can quickly assess the situation and have the power to direct action about what repairs to implement, which streets/ intersections require police traffic control, and to determine priorities for restoration of service to transit, freight and traffic operations. Their decisions must circulate between each agency's communication supervisors creating two-way flow of information. Constant contact means current, reliable information is being used and distributed to the public.

#### Emergency Service Providers

Hospitals, emergency centers, Fire and Police Departments, and State Highway Patrol need speedy, up-to-date details describing the most accessible routes for their vehicles and quick emergency response. Minutes will count in saving lives and attending to the most critical needs.

#### Media

Media outlets are key to information dissemination and must be supplied with reliable, frequent updates. Per the *Seattle Disaster & Readiness Plan* and the *Emergency Support Function –5: Emergency Public Information Annex*, designated agency staff will use whatever methods necessary (phone, email, fax, etc.) to provide direction and updates to the EOC. Through the EOC, media releases will be coordinated between all affected transportation agencies, avoiding duplication and illustrating a united effort.

#### Schools

Safe routes for parents to collect their children, or for School District buses to take students home must be broadcast to public schools, private schools, and parents in impacted areas. According to David Anderson, Director of Transportation for the Seattle School District, the AWW is used for few routes transporting students. In the event that the AWW is unusable, the District has re-routing plans in place and the ability to keep students overnight if necessary.

#### Major Civic Facilities

Safeco Field, Quest Stadium, the Seattle Center, etc. need guidance should an emergency occur during sporting events, concerts, or other special events, to help manage the large number of cars leaving parking lots to get home.

#### Special Needs

Hearing or visually impaired and English as a second language community members require alternative forms of communication. Hotlines and written materials with large print and graphics

directing people to detours and alerting them of street closures will be necessary. If bus routes and stops are relocated, impacts to access for people with mobility issues must also be considered.

#### Freight: Trucks and Rail

In the first 24 hours, trucks and rail must know where they can and cannot travel and alternate locations for off-loading goods. In extended periods of Viaduct closure, communicating load zone changes, acceptable delivery hours/days, etc. to freight shippers and the Port must occur. Hazardous or combustible materials carriers must have direction about what routes they can safely use.

#### Hospitality Services and Visitors

Tourists must understand limitations to travel within the downtown area and know what their options are for getting to train service at King Street Station or to the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport.

#### Businesses, Employees, Property Owners and Residents

Downtown employers, workers and residents must be kept apprised of how to get into and out of downtown in cars and alternative modes of transportation. Depending on the circumstances and length of closure, options such as extended work shifts, ridesharing and telecommuting may need to be emphasized.

#### **Timeframe**

The communication plan recommends actions and messaging for near-term – within 48-hours of an emergency occurring and longer-term –the first two-weeks of an emergency. Should a closure last longer than two weeks, a communications program would be developed during the initial timeframe to address the significant citywide and regional impacts.

#### **Agency Dispatch / Control Centers**

Each transportation agency in the region has a comprehensive, defined emergency protocol and various forms of operational dispatch/control centers. During an emergency of significant size all centers are likely to be operating. These include the Washington State Department of Transportation, King County Department of Transportation, Port of Seattle, and Coast Guard. More information on individual agencies is available in the *Seattle Disaster & Readiness Plan, Organizational Responsibilities Tab*.

The importance of the dispatch/control centers working together cannot be overstated. Infrastructure and services overlap and messaging from each must be consistent to avoid public and agency confusion. Each government continues to be responsible for messages related to its jurisdictional boundaries and joint messages must be coordinated. For these reasons, action plans and communication among agencies is vetted through each agency's jurisdictional EOC. Each EOC has liaison protocols for coordination among the jurisdictions.

Informal means of coordination also include monitoring each agency's Web site and using videoconferencing and conference calls to communicate. SDOT and WSDOT's Northwest Regional Traffic Management Center have a shared 150 MHz radio communications system.

The City of Seattle's *Emergency Public Information Annex* describes public information roles, responsibilities and procedures as directed by the Mayor's Communications Director during activation of the City of Seattle's Emergency Operations Center and is attached in the appendix.

## **Communication Methods**

### External Communications

There are a number of communication mediums through which the public can be informed. These include the City's new Community Notification System (Reverse 9-1-1), the Auxiliary Communications Service (ACS), the Medical Services Communication Team (MST), Emergency Alert System (KIRO AM 710), and the Highway Advisory Radio (HAR) operated by WSDOT. Use of these systems is only authorized through the Emergency Operations Center as described in *Emergency Support Function –5: Emergency Public Information Annex*. Further information on the numerous communications mediums available in an emergency are covered in detail in the *Seattle Disaster & Readiness Plan, Appendix 3*.

### Internal Communication

SDOT has a responsibility for internal communications as well to ensure:

- informed division decision makers
- thoughtful response to event conditions,
- prioritization of resources (staff and stock)

### Means of Communication

#### **Nextel Walkie-Talkie Phones**

City staff using the Nextel *i90c* models can use the direct connect feature, rather than dialing to save time. A Direct Contact or Private ID number is required. These numbers have been programmed into SDOT communication staff phones. The Appendices include instructions which describe how to locate a Private ID, store a Private ID and call or answer a direct connection. If the event causing the closure of the AWW is a broad scale event such as an earthquake or terrorist act, it is highly likely the telephone system (including cellular service) will be overloaded and of limited value. This includes walkie-talkie features on the Nextel *i90c*.

#### **Radios**

Radios are the standard medium for communications for most of SDOT field operations and will likely be the most reliable system of communication. SDOT utilizes three radio systems:

- 1) 800 MHz –used citywide, especially by Fire & Police.
- 2) 150 MHz – these radios are not available at the SDOT desk at the EOC, but this radio system has been used for many years by SDOT operations. It is typically used by crews in the field to talk to each other and to communicate with Dispatch.
- 3) 450 MHz – This is the preferred SDOT system for use in special events such as snow storm, earthquake, or a disaster. It is monitored 24/7 by Charles Street Dispatch and can be used to get messages and/or information to/from crews.

It is the responsibility of SDOT's incident coordinator to keep SDOT's representative to the EOC advised of conditions, recommendations, and emerging issues. This information becomes SDOT's

input into the City's Incident Action Plan. Information is disseminated by the ESF-5. Radio is also used to communicate with WDOT responders,

### **Message Content and Style**

When preparing messages to be submitted to the ESF-5 Coordinator use brief, non-technical language that can be easily converted to bulleted format and as possible supply graphics. Maps should have landmarks identified, directional arrows and minimal clutter for easy reading and reproduction. When relaying information always start with the most important information first:

- How have things changed
- What can we expect to know and when
- What do we want people to consider to maintain mobility

The ESF-5 Coordinator will use this information to provide descriptions of affected and non-affected areas to the public. The coordinator will add a time stamp help listeners gauge the relevancy of information. Call-to-action statement(s) creating appropriate public response such as: safety instructions, evacuation instructions, or indicating where shelter or other care facility locations, information outlets, etc. are encouraged. Always share where and when more detailed follow-up information will be available.

### **Short-term Strategies/Actions/Messages**

The following strategies, actions and messages are meant to guide communications during the first 48 hours of an emergency being declared.

#### Strategies

- Provide audiences with accurate information about what has happened
- Manage emergency response access
- Reduce burden on road network (freeways and surface streets) and on transit
- Reduce the number of vehicles coming to/through downtown Seattle
- Ensure safe, patrolled travel routes are used
- Ensure safe routes for freight carriers and direct the movement of hazardous materials

#### Actions:

- Distribute press releases and hold press conferences
- Use a downtown business listserv and Business Emergency Network (BEN) to supply employers with details of the event and pre-designated emergency routes. Recipients will be expected to forward information to other employees and other businesses using an email chain to communicate.
- Collaborate with the Economic Development Council of Seattle-King County to spread messages.
- Use of variable message signing and static signing to clearly mark detour routes and warn of closures.
- Notify motorists of traffic conditions while they still have the option to take alternate routes or use alternative modes of travel.
- Prepare a base map illustrating all running bus routes and stops.

- Make use of SDOT project listserves and other email subscription lists to reach out to neighborhoods throughout Seattle.
- Use Highway Advisory Radio and distribute route maps to trucking companies and associations that include routes for hazardous materials.
- Use close circuit cameras to provide real-time road conditions via the Internet.
- Place updates on the Regional Public Information Network, Central Puget Sound's breaking news and alert system.
- Coordinate with Metropolitan Improvement District Officers to disseminate information.

### Messages

The following messages can be updated with information that reflects the current situation. When SDOT staff speaks with the public or a reporter, the ESF-5 established message should be the first and last thing mentioned.

#### **Initial messages**

- An earthquake has occurred.
- The Alaskan Way Viaduct has been damaged and SR 99 is closed to traffic.
- We are doing everything we can to rescue people. Firefighters are assessing neighborhood districts for damage and looking for immediate safety hazards.
- If you are in a safe place, stay where you are.
- If you are on the road, yield to emergency vehicles and don't block the intersections.
- Safe access routes are being identified.
- The electricity is out in large parts of downtown. Please treat dark signals as all way stops
- Please call 911 only if there is a fire, medical emergency or a crime in progress to avoid overloading the system.
- Continue to listen to your television and radio for directions and information.

#### **Shortly after event: (2-4 hours after the event)**

- If you are in the downtown area, stay where you are until exit routes are established. If you are outside the center city, do not come downtown – traffic will be gridlocked.
- Rescue efforts are underway. Priority on all roads goes to emergency vehicles.
- Areas from First West to the waterfront are under police control.
- The Seattle Department of Transportation is inspecting all city transportation structures (roads, bridges, stairways).
- Updates will be provided about downtown exit routes, detours and transit stops as information becomes available. Please listen to your television and radio for directions and information.
- Aide stations are being set up around downtown.

#### **Later Messages (6-10 hours after the event)**

- The status of downtown is \_\_\_\_\_.
- The status of the Alaskan Way Viaduct is \_\_\_\_\_.
- Conditions of the utilities and traffic are \_\_\_\_\_.
- Rescue efforts are underway. Priority on all roads goes to emergency vehicles

- Second and Fourth Avenues are designated as detour routes through downtown.
- The Seattle Department of Transportation continues to inspect all city transportation structures (roads, bridges, stairways).
- Non-essential downtown personnel should stay home tomorrow
- For tomorrow's commute, please try to use transit, carpools or walk, as traffic is extremely congested.
- Continue to listen to your television and radio for directions and information.
- Are ferries running
  - You may access Coleman dock [in cars/walk-on only] via [street].
  - Coleman Dock is damaged. To leave downtown Seattle you may [drive/walk-on] at [pre-determined backup access site].
- Where should freight go
  - Freight traveling to the Port of Seattle/Interbay has priority along [route].
  - Freight carrying hazardous materials north-south should take [route] and east-west on [route].
  - Access to the Port is closed due to [state condition]. Trucks should reroute to [site].
  - Damage to the Port is being assessed and more information is expected to be known [insert timeframe]

### **Longer-term Strategies/Actions/Messages**

The following strategies, actions and messages are meant to guide communications after the first 48 hours of an emergency being declared. This will help to re-distribute traffic, maintain mobility, and ensuring that emergency response and repairs can continue.

It is likely that after the after the initial event response and conditions are stabilized, SDOT will continue to coordinate communications with the EOC Communications Director to ensure continuity and accuracy of messaging.

### Strategies

- Update audiences about what has happened.
- Promote the advantages of transit, carpooling, working shorter or longer shifts and telecommuting.
- Support Seattle's economic base with access to and from businesses for shopping and inventory needs.
- Encourage use of I-405 as possible to relieve I-5 and allow displaced traffic from the Viaduct to shift over.

### Actions:

- Make use of variable message signing to clearly mark detour routes
- Encourage transit use, ridesharing through Building Owners and Managers Association, Downtown Seattle Association, Commute Trip Reduction Employer network, Greater Seattle Chamber of Commerce, Commuter Challenge, SDOT's programs
- Encourage downtown building garages to use their short-term parking for carpools.
- Make use of SDOT project listserves and other email subscription lists



- Promote Park n Ride locations.
- Encourage commuters to varying driving times to avoid, as possible, periods of peak hour congestion.
- Ask trucks to deliver supplies at night.

Messages:

- Status of downtown is \_\_\_\_\_.
- Status of utilities and traffic is \_\_\_\_\_.
- If possible, return to your normal schedule. Unaffected businesses are still open.
- Volunteers can report to the Red Cross stations at \_\_\_\_\_.
- The downtown detour routes for the Viaduct are Second and Fourth.
- The status of the bridges is \_\_\_\_\_.
- The status of the HOV lanes is \_\_\_\_\_.
- Bus lanes are in effect all day long.
- No parking will be permitted on First, Second and Fourth avenues, as the city is still in recovery mode and will begin repairs soon.
- Use transit or carpool, as conditions downtown will be congested and the parking supply is limited.
- Alternate ferry routes are \_\_\_\_\_.
- Trucks may make deliveries during [state times].

**WSDOT'S PUBLIC COMMUNICATION PLAN**

After completing the initial emergency response and closure, activating of the emergency operations center, contacting bridge preservation, WSDOT communicates to the public important information and updates.

Communications with the public will be critical so that all travelers, business owners, and freight haulers will understand what is being done during this emergency, and how to best handle their transportation needs during this time. A closure of the viaduct will affect all routes going into, through, and around Seattle. Information needs to be very broadly distributed. Those impacted by a viaduct closures will need to know all the transportation options.

As outlined below, a top-down emergency communications plan is developed for use in the event of major infrastructure damage or necessary inspection closures on the Alaska Way Viaduct.

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**AWV - Emergency Communication Plan**

WSDOT Northwest Region's radio room will contact the Regional Public Information Officer to inform that Viaduct has been closed. During off-hours the on-call PIO officer will be contacted via the PIO pager.

PIO will find out:

- Why is the viaduct closed?

- What is the impact to traffic?
- Where exactly is the damage?
- When did it close?
- How long will it remain closed? (Estimation)
- Alternate routes
- Who is at the scene?
- What is WSDOT's role? (Emergency response? Engineers?)
- Fatalities/Injuries? If so who is contact person?
- Visibility – can it be seen on web?
- Who has called about it? (Media and others)
- Who else has been notified?
- Who the other agency contacts are

The above questions and an established Alaskan Way Viaduct Fact Sheet which details the history, average daily traffic counts, etc., will provide the pertinent information for the PIO to successfully interact with all internal and external customers. **[Note: The fact sheet needs to be developed by the UCO project office leading the Viaduct Replacement Project. Once complete, the fact sheet will need to be placed in this report.]**

### **Phone Calls**

The PIO will call and coordinate efforts with:

- WSDOT management (see Appendix J)
- The Emergency Operations Center if activated
- The City of Seattle PIO
- WSF PIO

### **Public Information / External Communication**

The PIO will develop messages and disseminate information using the following:

- Variable Message Signs (working with TMSC staff)
- Highway Advisory Radios (working with TMSC staff)
- Press releases
- Incident report page - [www.wsdot.wa.gov/pugetsoundtraffic/incidentseattle.htm](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/pugetsoundtraffic/incidentseattle.htm)
- Web site - [www.wsdot.wa.gov/regions/Northwest/](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/regions/Northwest/) Laura Merritt 360.790.0127 after hours (**HOT** news link on front page)
- Direct media calls
- Metro Traffic (386-7770)
- KOMO AM 1000 (404-3404) on the weekend because they do the most traffic reports.
- KIRO Radio (728-8307/8308)
- If visual story seen with a DOT camera, call TV media immediately
- NW Cable News (448-3616)
- Press conference - CALL AP AND ASK THEM TO PUT OUT A MEDIA ALERT. (AP – 1-800-552-7694, after hours 285-3322.)

### **Agency/Organization Notifications**

The PIO will notify organizations that have critical transportation interests in the SR 99 viaduct corridor.

- City of Seattle DOT (206) 386-1218 or through WSDOT Communications Center to SDOT Dispatch Center using 150 MHz radio system
- Metro Transit
- Port of Seattle
- Washington Trucking Association
- Washington State Ferries
- Washington Utilities & Transp. Commission (rail interest)

### **Information Flow**

The PIO will work with the TSMC to get updated information throughout the situation, finding out:

- What's new?
  - How have things changed since last update?
  - Has WSDOT succeeded at doing something?
  - Any assessments to share with the media?
- What's next?
  - What is WSDOT expected to know in the coming ½ hour?
  - What is WSDOT concerned about?
  - What is WSDOT watching?
- When can WSDOT update the media next with new information?

The PIO will listen to Media questions

- Find out what the media wants to know
- Find out what viewers are asking/telling them

PIO will provide and receive information from on-scene PIO or WSDOT field spokesperson.

### **Continually Check**

The PIO will:

- Verify external communication is up to date.
- Check web, incident page, VMS, HAR for consistent messages
- Monitor TV and radio stations.

### **Posting Shifts**

If the event is on-going, the PIO will brief the next PIO:

- Who key players are
- Phone/e-mail lists used
- Frequently asked questions thus far
- What WSDOT is watching for

The PIO will also write a brief wrap-up before ending the shift.