

TRANSIT AGENCIES SIMULATE RESPONSE TO FLOODS

Local, state and federal government coordinated exercise in Natomas

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SACRAMENTO – Transit agencies from across the Sacramento region conducted an exercise coordinating and responding to a simulated levee breach yesterday. This was the first coordinated transit exercise in the Sacramento region. Transit agencies independently test their emergency plans, but this exercise focused on coordination between transit operators and the Sacramento County Office of Emergency Services.

The exercise involved nine transit operators from the Sacramento region: Placer County Transit, Yolo County Transportation District, Paratransit, Inc., Sacramento Regional Transit, Roseville Transit, El Dorado Transit, South County Transit Link, Fairfield Suisun Transit, and Amtrak. Additionally, SACOG, the Sacramento County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and the Natomas Unified School District provided exercise support.

To simulate a potential flood event, the exercise assumed rising water levels along the Sacramento and American rivers. In response, the Sacramento County EOC simulated activation. The EOC began the process of contacting transit providers in the Sacramento Region at 10:00 a.m. The EOC then asked for the transit operators to deploy vehicles to the Natomas School District Education Center to be ready to evacuate North Natomas residents during volunteer and mandatory evacuations. Eight buses were deployed representing six of the nine participating agencies.

The buses overcame several simulated road closures accessing the evacuation staging location at the Natomas Education Center. A levee breach near the Sacramento Airport was announced once the buses were at the staging area. This triggered simulated shuttling of evacuees to a staging location at the Sacramento County EOC. Once the shuttle run was completed, the vehicles were redeployed to safe locations for future use.

The primary challenge for region-wide transit coordination is managing communications between nearly a dozen government agencies. The Sacramento County EOC serves as the primary point of information for transit agencies during an emergency. They were aided in this exercise by Sacramento Regional Transit and Paratransit Inc., both of which activated their Emergency Operations Centers.

Most of the transit operators were able to deploy staff to the Sacramento County EOC to provide critical information sharing capabilities to the information controllers at the EOC. All participating operators successfully completed the exercise. Operators that were not able to deploy staff provided data to the EOC through pre-established communications channels.

The exercise concluded at 2:00 p.m. with a debriefing with all participating agencies. The exercise was coordinated by SACOG, with technical support from the consulting firm Booz Allen Hamilton and funding from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. An after-action report will be released in early December 2007.

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