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Meeting Notes

MANAGEMENT, OPERATIONS, AND INTELLIGENT TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS (MOITS) POLICY TASK FORCE and MOITS TECHNICAL TASK FORCE

CHAIRS: Hon. David Snyder, City of Falls Church
and James Austrich, DDOT

DATE: Tuesday, September 14, 2004

TIME: 12:30 P.M.

PLACE: COG, 777 North Capitol Street, NE, First Floor, Room 1

ATTENDANCE:

Jim Austrich, DDOT
Ron Burns, MDOT
Howard Chang, Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland
Jim Clark, Wilbur Smith Associates
John Contestabile, MDOT/GOHS
Scott Cowherd, VDOT Central Office
Kathy Franklin, Trichord
Noah Goodall, PB Farradyne
Bob Grow, Greater Washington Board of Trade
Doug Hansen, Fairfax County DOT
William Haynes, City of Alexandria
Al Himes, Alexandria Transit
Amy Tang McElwain, VDOT Northern Virginia
Frank Mirack, FHWA
Jean Yves Point-du-Jour, MSHA
Sharmila Samarasinghe, Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation
Susan Sharp, WMATA
Kamal Suliman, VDOT
Phil Tarnoff, University of Maryland
Jose Thommana, Arlington County
Alex Verzosa, City of Fairfax
Bob Winick, Motion Maps, LLC
Mike Zezeski, MSHA

MOITS Policy and Technical Task Forces
Notes from the September 14, 2004 Joint Meeting
Page 2

COG Staff Attendance:

Andrew Austin
Michael Farrell
Andrew Meese
Gerald Miller

1. Welcome and Introductions

Participants introduced themselves.

2. Update on the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) Process and Funding

Mr. Meese and Mr. Austrich had just attended a planning meeting on the Command Post Exercise, one of a series of exercises planned by the emergency management agencies (EMAs) and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), supported by a contractor putting the exercises together. A Senior Leaders exercise had taken place on June 17, and the Command Post Exercise was to take place on September 27.

These were emergency management agency-focused exercises. State and local EMAs were to determine which transportation or other functional area agencies would participate. WMATA had been invited and involved. Copies of the DHS contractor's progress report were distributed to the group. It was suggested that MOITS participants, if they had concerns or wished to be involved, should talk to their own jurisdiction's EMA contact person, or individual transportation personnel may be contacted by their jurisdiction's EMA to participate in the September 27 exercise.

The possibility of piggybacking transportation sector communications tests onto the September 27 EMA exercise was discussed, but there were concerns expressed whether it would be advisable to undertake such activities simultaneous but independent of the EMAs. Participants were advised to talk to their EMA contact before proceeding.

There had been discussion in the EMA group about reevaluating the plans for future regional exercises, so there was some uncertainty at this point whether there would be more regional EMA exercises, when, and in what form. Therefore, it was discussed whether MOITS as Regional Emergency Support Function (RESF) 1 – Transportation should hold another workshop or two during this fiscal year. These would be functional area workshops, similar in format to the ones held in late 2003, to discuss transportation scenarios, perhaps in early calendar year 2005. The upcoming National Capital Region Incident Management Conference, scheduled for October 28, was discussed as a possible opportunity for a workshop drill, but it was thought that the agenda was already full, and that a workshop would be best scheduled separately.

MOITS Policy and Technical Task Forces
Notes from the September 14, 2004 Joint Meeting
Page 3

Regarding the Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI), on September 1 the COG Chief Administrative Officers (CAOs) committee had met to discuss the remaining uncommitted funding. No final decisions were made, with a back-and-forth discussion between the CAOs and the COG Disaster and Emergency Preparedness Committee. There was now, however, a designated person in the DC government, Steven Kral, tracking the projects funded by UASI, and sometimes suggesting changes in the timing of committed projects to take best advantage of available funding. The CAOs in August and September went through a prioritization listing of possible projects. Funds for systems integration among transportation agencies originally made this priority cut, but were later combined into a broad systems integration category across all function areas.

3. Update on Traveler Information – 511 Activities

[The original agenda order was switched due to participant availability.] PBS&J, Inc. had been awarded the VDOT contract to develop a regional traveler information system. The feasibility study uncovered a couple of hurdles. To meet the February launch deadline, the feasibility study needed to be moved out two months. The next meetings were to be November 3 [later rescheduled to November 1], implementation meeting on January 14, and feasibility study meeting on March 16. At that point, what the Virginia statewide system will look like will be known, helping the decision on whether and how to move forward in the Washington region. Additional 511 signs were being manufactured by the VDOT sign shop to support the upcoming launch.

Future meetings also were to be held on the Regional Integrated Transportation Information System (RITIS) on 511 to determine how these efforts will relate to each other. The ad hoc meeting on systems integration was to take place at the University of Maryland Center for Advanced Transportation Technology (CATT) lab on September 22.

4. Update on ITS Architecture Activities

Mr. Meese announced that, as of September 20, COG had hired Jim Yin as a systems engineer. Mr. Yin will be a regional point person on development and maintenance of the regional ITS architecture. Mr. Yin had worked on the Metropolitan Washington Regional ITS Architecture in his previous position at PB Farradyne, Inc., in addition to many other related and relevant projects throughout his career. With Mr. Yin's support, the Regional ITS Architecture subcommittee was to be restarted, and, for the larger group, stakeholder workshops would be held. The first stakeholder workshop was tentatively set for Tuesday, November 30, 2004, 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM. The region has an April 2005 federal deadline to fill the gaps in the regional ITS architecture.

5. Update on Recommendation for Actions to Improve Regional Transportation Communications and Coordination during Incidents

Following the adoption of the Transportation Annex of the Regional Emergency Coordination Plan, two ad hoc work groups were formed to improve transportation agency communications and coordination during emergencies. One dealt with procedures and operations, and the other with systems integration. Both groups had met several times over the course of the summer. There had also been conference calls at a steering committee level among the three state DOTs and WMATA. They agreed to bring a progress report to the TPB every two months, which Mr. Contestabile was to present at the September 15 TPB meeting on behalf of the groups. Copies of the draft presentation were distributed to the group for feedback.

Mr. Burns summarized the progress that had been made thus far. The first area of communication is one-on-one, including both the regional and the agency paging systems. At the interagency level, system-to-system communication will enable agencies to exchange information. DDOT will get a CHART workstation, as will WMATA. Agency to public communication will take place through RITIS, which Phil Tarnoff and the CATT lab were now addressing.

Mr. Contestabile did a dry run of the slides to be presented to the TPB and solicited comments. The group discussed several potential additions or changes: mention of the importance of the federal component of communications; appropriate coverage of the current status of regional communications; and concern that an over-emphasis on current activities would be perceived negatively by the TPB, seeming to avoid talking about what needs to be done. Instead, the emphasis was to be what the transportation sector will do in the future. Communications to the media and communications to the public need to be considered both together and separately as topics.

It was agreed that a steering committee to needed to meet regularly, at least via a conference call. The four agencies with 24-7 operations centers would be the key stakeholders on this steering committee. The idea was to speed progress by allowing those agencies with the most resources to coordinate. COG staff was to work with members to set a schedule for these steering committee conference calls and meetings.

Ms. McElwain briefly discussed IRIS, a data integration software that will be used in Virginia. It is similar to EMMA, the data integration software that will be used by the State of Maryland. EMMA will probably get some UASI funding, and may be deployed by the end of this year. EMMA would access CHART and RITIS. IRIS will probably not be operational statewide before June. Mr. Contestabile suggested that the people working on IRIS talk to the people working on EMMA. It was agreed not to go into technical details on these in the TPB presentation, perhaps covering it only through description of an example incident.

The New York TRANSCOM model of coordination was discussed. Mr. Contestabile stated that we do not need a TRANSCOM that runs systems, but we need coordination on a regional level. This group does it on a planning basis, but we need a 24/7 operations coordinating

MOITS Policy and Technical Task Forces
Notes from the September 14, 2004 Joint Meeting
Page 5

capability. Agencies do not need to be told what to do, but they do need to get information so that they know what action they need to take. The solution is better information flow, individual-to-individual, and agency-to-agency. Interoperability is the solution everyone likes to complain about, but no one wants to do anything about. Are people using the means they already have, like telephones? It is hard to visualize incidents that occur in other jurisdictions, or how one's own incidents affect others. Systems integration is helpful, because it shares information automatically. Agencies will share information freely, without too much outside compulsion. Priorities and resource levels are not always the same for different agencies and in different emergencies; the EMAs assert more authority in bigger incidents. Mr. Point-du-Jour noted that TRANSCOM did not happen all at once – they started out with coordination and systems integration. Even now TRANSCOM does not dictate to the agencies what to do, although they do make suggestions.

Mr. Contestabile noted that as of now there is a lag between an incident and notification that slows reaction time in neighboring agencies. We should try to bring information sharing to a near real-time level. Our coordination protocols are the weakest at the regional level. We should identify protocols for each type of incident – local, regional, state, and national. A criticism of the RICCS has been that the pages are not customized. Agencies should customize their paging lists to the scale of the incident.

Ms. Sharp and others noted that agencies may not be as effective as they could be about sharing with other agencies information on incidents within their systems. Mr. Contestabile agreed that most agencies focused so much on managing the incident that they do not pay much attention to the ripple effects of an incident on other agencies. You need to have someone whose job it is to consider the bigger picture. Incidents can escalate from local to regional. We need to identify the scope of the incident faster, and share information faster. However, a concern was raised that a TRANSCOM-style agency might actually slow reaction time, because it involves another agency in a decision-making role. Instead, the agencies should do more pre-planning and put technical systems in place to ensure that they get timely information. It is too hard to work out a response while the incident is unfolding unless substantial pre-planning has occurred.