BEYOND NEW JERSEY TRAFFIC INCIDENT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIC PLAN: A ROAD TO IMPLEMENTATION

By: New Jersey Department of Transportation

IN THIS CASE STUDY YOU WILL LEARN:

1. How the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) formalized a coordinated advancement of their Traffic Incident Management (TIM) program through a statewide steering committee including 26 public and private agencies and stakeholders.

2. How working groups were used to bring together stakeholders focusing on specific aspects of TIM.

3. How NJDOT used the initiative on NJTIM.org to host over 390 classes that resulted in 7,200 trained first responders, and over 410 new trainers ready to educate the new class of first responders.

BACKGROUND

Traffic incidents represent a significant cause of congestion and the congestion-related delays experienced by the New Jersey motorists on a daily basis. To address this problem, the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) initiated a strategic effort to formalize a coordinated and systematic expansion and advancement of the New Jersey Traffic Incident Management Program (NJ TIM), building upon the robust TIM practices that had already been in place. To guide the advancement of the NJ TIM Program, a statewide steering committee was formed, including 26 public and private agencies and stakeholders. The committee serves as a focal point of strategic initiatives for TIM Program improvements by providing leadership, direction, and support to local and regional TIM activities. The program is guided by the National Unified Goal for Traffic Incident Management, which encourages individuals, agencies and organizations to work together to achieve: improved responder safety; safe, quick clearance; and prompt, reliable, interoperable communications. In addition to the statewide steering committee, regional committees have been formed in the North and South regions of New Jersey. These two committees consist of agency representatives with the firsthand experience and responsibilities in traffic incident response and management with active involvement in ongoing local and regional TIM coordination efforts.

TSMO PLANNING, STRATEGIES, AND DEPLOYMENT

In 2015, to establish a formalized TIM program, NJDOT sponsored the development and adoption of the State of New Jersey TIM Strategic Plan, which provides a framework for current and future TIM efforts. The strategic plan identified several organizational, operational, and management gaps pertaining to the current TIM activities. The plan also provided recommendations and outlined action items needed to bridge these gaps and ensure the continued success of the TIM program.

The top-priority actions identified in the plan are:

1. Develop regional, interstate, and intrastate plans and task forces to implement comprehensive multi-disciplinary TIM programs including response areas, on-scene incident management, and after-action reviews.

2. Enhance and expand TIM training and outreach.

3. Establish and implement a standard and efficient use of technology and promote the integration of TMC and law enforcement CAD systems.
4. Support implementation of a common interagency communications protocol/process for all incident management personnel.
5. Review and improve towing practices and procedures for limited access highways.
6. Provide timely and accurate information to the media and motorists and to identify the most effective ways of getting the information out to the public (e.g., detour routes).

Based on the strategic direction articulated in the plan, working groups were formed to bring together stakeholders focusing on specific aspects of TIM. The diversity of TIM stakeholders was critical since each stakeholder has a specific role and responsibility at an incident scene. Bringing the diverse stakeholders together provided the benefit of unique perspectives on problem-solving and ensured that the existing deficiencies and gaps are addressed from all points of view. Closing the gaps in many cases required bridging institutional, technological and human barriers, so the champions (chairs) in each working group were charged to identify an approach that would best address their specific goals.

COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING AND EXECUTION

The following are summarized accomplishments of a few working groups established under the NJTIM Statewide Strategic Plan:

- **Working Group 1:** The working group focused on establishing and fostering collaboration, communication and development of traffic mitigation and incident response plans with local agencies and governments for the Route 495 bridge reconstruction project. The Route 495 bridge reconstruction project, which started in September 2018, has a significant impact on the motoring public in New Jersey, creating travel delays to both commuters and goods movement operators. The 495 Incident Management and Operations Task Force (IM&O) was formed in 2017 and is comprised of various agencies (transportation, fire, EMS, law enforcement, etc., that operate along Route 495). The Task Force meets regularly to discuss an efficient and coordinated response to incidents and weather-related events during all stages of construction.

- **Working Group 2:** NJDOT announced the launch of a new NJTIM website during the National Traffic Incident Response Week, November 14-18, 2016. The website serves as a portal for TIM outreach and for first responder training. The website allows the first responders to sign up for an existing TIM training class or request a class to be hosted at their agency. The outreach activities of the TIM program focused on expanding the knowledge of the TIM program to first responder agencies across the state. The working group members were tasked to present TIM program mission and goals at Law Enforcement, Fire and EMS training academies, conferences, and Towmen’s convention. The outreach is also extended to the board of the New Jersey Joint Insurance Funds (NJ JIFs) who serve municipalities and counties statewide and provide insurance coverage and programs. NJ JIFs have also
established a Safety Incentive Program that addresses a variety of risk management and safety issues, including law enforcement and public works employee safety.

**Working Group 3:** Focus is on interoperable and cooperative communication among the TIM first responders. The group has a challenging task, which requires bridging various technologies to establish standards-based, open communications between responding agencies during major incidents, special events or adverse weather events. The working group members judiciously worked on a communications plan for the 495 IM&O Task Force and successfully developed and implemented a communications plan that establishes a platform that allows the first responders to use their different technologies and still be able to communicate effectively with each other.

**OUTCOMES, BENEFITS, AND LEARNINGS**

From the beginning it was clear that the outreach efforts require a systematic approach to problem-solving and that the champions must come from all agencies involved in TIM, not just DOT. For example, the monthly meetings of the 495 Task Force not only established a better relationship among the stakeholders but also resulted in better incident response coordination. At every meeting, different agencies present and discuss with each other their individual response to specific incidents, which helps solidify TIM training principles. The task force worked collaboratively to develop a staging plan for all TIM assets responding to incidents, as well as maps that identify responsibilities of each jurisdiction during snowstorms. The 495 IM&O Task Force communications plan is actively used and all local responding agencies participate. This is a tremendous accomplishment considering the difficulties of providing interoperability across various communication platforms and technologies. The outreach activities of the TIM program had outstanding achievements. Since its inception, NJTIM.org hosted over 390 classes that resulted in 7,200 trained first responders, and over 410 new trainers ready to train the new class of first responders. The TIM training became mandatory for all New Jersey State Police recruits in July 2018. In 2019, the TIM training was incorporated into the Firefighter 101 Curriculum taught in all fire academies in New Jersey. On October 1st, the NJTIM Training was delivered to over 70 JIF members. The training counted towards the Safety Incentive Program requirements for the associations. To ensure and support working group efforts, the progress is presented by its chair at the statewide steering committee meetings, held bi-annually. Currently, the NJ TIM Strategic Plan is being updated, as several critical gaps have been successfully addressed and some new strategic initiatives have been proposed by the stakeholders.