



Left Behind

The Dilemma of Transit
for the Poor and Disabled
in a Disaster

Patricia Whitfield, Ed.D.
Associate Professor
Department of Human
Development and Services
North Carolina Agricultural and
Technical State University

Brooklyn, New York
September 11, 2001



Emergency Evacuation

In the desperate hours following the 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, thousands of people fled the disasters on foot.







**What happens to individuals
with disabilities in a disaster?**



What happens to people who have...

- Mobility challenges
- Visual impairments
- Hearing impairments
- Hypertension
- Cardiac disease
- Respiratory ailments
- Mental retardation and mental illness
- Attention deficit disorders

Lessons from 9/11

- Some persons with disabilities evacuated on their own or with the help of others.
- Other persons with disabilities waited for help to arrive and many who waited, perished.

National Council on Disability Study (2005)

The study concluded that most disaster plans are usually “designed for people who can move quickly, walk, see, and hear, and that people with disabilities are typically left out of the planning process”.

Changes in Emergency Planning

- The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has developed directives to address the emergency preparedness needs of persons with disabilities.
- In July 2004, President Bush mandated all federal agencies to develop emergency plans to address the needs of persons with disabilities.

Changes con't

- In September 2005, the Department of Transportation developed a new website detailing emergency preparedness for persons with disabilities including how to evacuate certain modes of transportation or how to respond to natural disasters.

Then...

Hurricane Katrina struck.



(AP PHOTO)

In 2005, the events surrounding Hurricane Katrina again raised important questions about safe emergency evacuation.





















Dependence on Transportation

- Race
- Poverty
- Disability
- Years of inequity contributed to a deficit of one key resource needed to flee the impending disaster –transportation.



Transit: The Vital Link Between the Poor and Community Resources

- The 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson decision rooted in Louisiana was the progenitor of the 'separate but equal' doctrine of racial discrimination in seating on railroad cars.
- The first successful bus boycott was in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.
- The Montgomery bus boycott of 1955 and 1956 was pivotal in the struggle for civil rights.

The Montgomery Bus Boycott 1955-1956



Rosa Parks

Montgomery Bus Boycott



New Orleans: Census 2000

- 67.3% of the population was African American.
- 28.1% was Caucasian.
- 53% were women.
- 23.6% between age 21-64 had disabilities.
- 50% of persons over age 65 was disabled.
- 10% of persons between 5-20 years old had disabilities.

Census Data con't

- The Center for Disease control estimates that 450,000 people with disabilities reside in the Gulf coast area affected by Hurricane Katrina.
- Likely many more were affected by trauma and temporary disability.
- 24.3% of African Americans reported a disability in the 2000 census.

Because transportation services have emerged in a race and class-conscious society, the losers are “the poor, powerless, and people of color” (Bullard 2004).

“People without cars and people with limited access to cars are disproportionately low-income people of color, low-income women, the elderly and disabled”
(Neal 2001).

New York University Poll

- Americans are no more prepared now for a disaster than they were before Hurricane Katrina.
- The poor were most impacted by the local and federal mismanagement of the disaster.
- (Loeb 2006) - what the poor really needed for evacuation was money. They had nowhere to go, and no transportation to get there.
- People with the financial resources to own cars or purchase airline tickets could evacuate themselves.

Transit in New Orleans

- In Louisiana, 30,000 people rely on bus services.
- One of three residents does not have a car (Hutchinson 2005).
- Few resources are located in poor communities so people rely on public transit to access resources.
- If they rely on public transit daily, they will need transit all the more in an emergency.

New Orleans

- According to *The Progress Report*, flooding was worse in New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward which is nearly 98% Black and where the average household income is less than \$27,500/year with a quarter earning less than \$10,000/year.
- Housing discrimination usually separates people from jobs, health care and other community resources but now, from safety too.



Challenges to Relief (Plant 2005)

- The physical infrastructure has received little attention.
- Some DOT emergency functions were transferred to Homeland Security.
- FEMA was transferred to Homeland Security and terrorism was a higher priority than natural disaster planning.
- We subsidize some modes (trucking, freight rail and commercial air travel) more than others such as commuter rail.
- Disruption in any part of the system brings chaos to the non-vehicle owning and slow mobilization of private resources. Many depended on alternative modes such as boats and helicopters after Katrina.













The Status of Emergency Planning for People with Disabilities

- 2005 – Marshalls, a major retailer, was required to provide accessible evacuation routes.
- 2005 – A small plane flew into the airspace at the Capitol and persons with disabilities were told to wait at the stairwell. That did not work.

Transit Security in Small Urban Areas: Planning to Meet the Needs of Consumers with Disabilities

- We do not know where people will be when disaster strikes.
- This study focused on natural or man-made emergencies that occur during transit or that require transit evacuation.

Buses at the World trade Center September 11, 2001



Mineta Transportation Institute Report (Jenkins and Gersten 2001)

- Between 1997 and 2000, 195 terrorist attacks were targeted on nine surface transportation systems around the world.
- Since then, there has been the 2004 train bombing in Madrid, the summer 2005 bombing of a bus in London and numerous attacks on public transportation in the middle east.
- A suicide bomber killed 30 people on a bus in Iraq in December, 2005.

Planning for Emergency Services

- The Federal Transportation Administration recommends that because of limited resources, smaller agencies must network with other agencies to do effective planning.
- There has been more support of airline security which impacted the upper classes and less for bus security which often serves the less affluent.

The Transit Security Study

- **Phase I** – Review of the literature in the areas of terrorism and other emergencies, planning for transit security, and paratransit services for consumers with disabilities.
- **Phase II and Phase III** - a structured interview was conducted with transit agency managers and operators in small and large cities in North Carolina.

Transit Study con't

- All agencies reported activity in the area of selection and training of paratransit operators and planning for man-made and natural disasters.
- Smaller agencies reported more training of drivers to recognize suspicious events and more collaboration with local law enforcement in keeping with the FTA recommendation for networking.

Transit Study con't

- Sixty percent of small agencies reported a need for more driver training.
- Large city agencies reported more focus on emergency planning and more rider training.
- All agencies reported a modest use of drills.
- Some agencies used their experience in weather related emergencies as a guide to a course of action for a terrorist event.

Transit Study con't

- No agency reported actual experience with a terrorist event.
- **Phase III** – Field interviews were conducted with bus drivers in small and large city areas to assess their views about transit security, their preparation for natural and man-made disasters and their training to serve riders with disabilities in an emergency.

Transit Study con't

- Seventy-one percent of drivers reported 'a lot of experience' with riders with disabilities.
- Only 30% of drivers reported an extensive understanding of the rights of the disabled and 41% considered themselves only moderately well informed in the rights of persons with disabilities.

Transit Study con't

- Sixty-five percent reported receiving training in the American's with Disabilities Act.
- Fifty-nine percent of drivers had work-related or personal experience with a person with a disability.
- Ninety-one percent reported going beyond job requirements to help a person with a disability.

Transit Study con't

- Eighty-six percent stated that riders with disabilities will have unique needs in an emergency.
- Fifty-six percent stated that their riders with disabilities would know what to do in an emergency when transit would not be able to return to pick them up.
- Ninety percent stated that they would stay behind or risk their own safety to ensure the security of riders with a disability.

Transit Study con't

- Only 37% of drivers had been trained how to respond in an emergency.
- And 30% had participated in a drill although not necessarily at the transit agency.
- Most said they were the security on the bus.
- Of the drivers, 83% had a plan of how to keep in touch with family during an emergency.
- Finally, 96% stated that they would remain at work as long as needed in an emergency.

Conclusions and Recommendations

- There are now numerous resources on the topic of security for persons with disabilities.
- Easter Seals Project Action – *Emergency Evacuation: Safe Egress of Persons with Disabilities From Transit Systems.*
- The Department of Transportation – *Emergency Preparedness and Individuals with Disabilities*

Resources con't

- The National Organization on Disability through the Emergency Preparedness Initiative (EPI) – *The Emergency Readiness Wheel for People with Disabilities*
- The American Red Cross – *Disaster Preparedness for People with Disabilities*

What We Know Now

- Clearly, we know more than we did but there are more questions such as in airline security where we are vigilant about passenger screening but not as careful about cargo screening.
- The 'buddy system' does not work as well as we thought.
- We need more drills.

What We Need

- Broader planning that includes persons with disabilities with emphasis on those who might not be employed or come to a meeting.
- Sensitivity to disability. Sometimes the interest of security and persons with disabilities collide as when the air marshals shot a mentally ill passenger in December 2005.
- More awareness of what the automobile-free lifestyle and poverty mean in an emergency.
- Better planning for the next disaster and putting information into the hands of persons with disabilities.