Keeping the Lines of Communication Open

The Dulles Toll Road Experience

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Keys to Success

- Communication is essential to the process
- Know the key stakeholders
- Who’s in charge of what
- Public perception and confidence
  - One message
Background of Dulles Toll Road

- Dulles Toll Road (Virginia Route 267) is an 8-lane, 14-mile (22.7 km) highway in Northern Virginia.

- The Virginia Department of Transportation transferred the operation of the Toll Road to the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority on November 1, 2008.

- The Airports Authority has been the sole operator of the Toll Road since October 1, 2009.

- The Airports Authority's purpose: Financing construction of Metrorail in the Corridor using Toll Road revenue to support the sale of bonds.
Where are we located

• East of the Dulles Toll Road is Washington D. C. — 625,000 citizens

• West of the Dulles Toll Road is Loudon County — 350,000 citizens

• Dulles Toll Road is within Fairfax County — over 1.1 million citizens
Know the players

- Virginia Department of Transportation
- Metropolitan Washington Council of Government
- Loudoun County
- National Capital Region
- Fairfax County
- Metropolitan Area Transportation Operations Coordination
Stakeholder who refuses to communicate: Mother Nature
When the Lines of Communication Fail

• Forecast called for a snow event of 2-4 inches to begin around 7 p.m.
  – Previous forecasts never materialized
• Planning conference calls in place
• Each agency had a unified plan
  – Roadways would be treated prior to rush hour
  – Snow removal equipment would be prepositioned before rush hour 5 p.m.
The Real Story

At approximately 3 p.m. a wave of ice/sleet covered the Washington D.C. area
Circumstances

- Public did not believe the forecast and timing
- Release of federal employees was not mandatory
- Schools did not release students until an hour prior to end of school day

The public was caught totally unaware when the storm hit and consequently were unprepared.

Subsequent attitude by federal employees was “I am not taking my leave” and employees primarily left between 3-5 p.m. — peak travel time.

Attitude again was that storm would not materialize. Suddenly an additional influx of people on the roads, including many school age children, increasing hazards.
When the Sun Came Out
Lessons Learned

• Plan for the worst and hope for the best
• Multiple messages provided by too many agencies
• One consistent message
• Reevaluate the plan
• Understanding each others’ role and the impact you can have on another agency by your actions
Where Are We Today

• Since January 1, 2013
  – Responded to 17 winter events
  – Total snow accumulation 8 inches
  – Total cost $749,023

• Preparing for the worst comes at a cost!!
The key to success is…
communication!

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