



I-95 Corridor Coalition

Quick Clearance and 'Move It' Best Practices Executive Summary

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**I-95 CORRIDOR
COALITION**

The I-95 Corridor Coalition is a partnership of service providers working together to improve transportation along the Atlantic Coast from Maine to Florida. For more information about this report, please contact Henry de Vries at (845) 876-1686 or hdevries@dot.state.ny.us. For more information about the I-95 Corridor Coalition, please contact Noreen Hazelton at (978) 835-3127 or at i95nhaze@aol.com. The full report is available on the Coalition Connection at www.i95coalition.org.

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Introduction

When we started driving, we were told not to move our car after an accident until the police arrived. Now, nearly half of the states in the nation have enacted “move-it” laws that encourage or even require drivers to move their vehicles out of the roadway if involved in a non-injury crash. This is because we have learned that moving/clearing vehicles involved in such crashes saves lives, reduces congestion, and improves travel. Six states in the I-95 Corridor Coalition have enacted “move-it” laws. Despite these laws, most drivers still don’t move their vehicles—probably still under the impression that the lessons from high school driver’s education still apply. Drivers making long distance, multi-state trips may not be aware that neighboring states have enacted “move-it” laws.

Truck crashes almost anywhere in the nation tie up highways for several hours while the trucks and cargo are treated carefully to avoid further damage. Meanwhile, huge backups, delays, and secondary crashes can and do occur.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) reports that of the 6.3 million highway crashes in 2002, 4.3 million were property damage only, 1.9 million were personal injury crashes, and 38,491 crashes resulted in one or more fatalities.¹ In other words, for as many as two thirds of the nation’s auto crashes, it is possible that vehicles could be immediately moved out of the travel lanes onto the shoulder, reducing fatalities, injuries and property damage from the accident, preventing secondary accidents, and reducing the duration and extent of traffic congestion caused by the crash. Estimates vary from 15% to over 30% of the crashes on freeways are secondary to other incidents that may be minor.² This is why it is essential to move minor incidents—even minor crashes—from the roadway as quickly as possible to reduce the possibility of secondary incidents.

Quick Clearance/Move-It Policies can have profound effects on traffic safety and reduce non-recurring congestion. The 2004 Urban Mobility Report³ indicates that good traffic incident management (TIM) practices, which are led by quick clearance actions, can reduce delay by 170 million hours annually. Quick clearance and move-it actions go hand in hand to assist in overall incident management, but there are many obstacles to the effective and uniform application of these policies. The I-95 Corridor Coalition and its members have recognized the need to address these issues and strive to achieve a more consistent application of quick clearance/move-it (QC/MI) practices throughout the Corridor, since many travelers traverse a number of its members’ jurisdictions and states.

¹ <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/pdf/nrd-30/NCSA/TSFAnn/TSF2002Final.pdf>

² “Traffic Incident Management Handbook,” Federal Highway Administration, 2000.

³ Schrank, D., and Lomax, T., “The 2004 Urban Mobility Report,” Texas Transportation Institute, September 2004.

The I-95 Corridor Coalition undertook this effort to review policies and procedures in the corridor in coordination with a National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP) study.

This executive summary provides an overview of recommended administrative, regulatory and statutory best practices, as well as an over-arching set of institutional recommendations to help focus continued member efforts towards more consistent incident management practices with resulting savings in lives, time and money.

Administrative Best Practices

These QC/MI best practices take the form of interagency practices or policy agreements, formalized traffic incident management teams, public outreach programs, and other actions that can be taken by one or more agencies without resorting to legal or formal regulatory procedures.

Policies

- Develop an “*open roads policy (ORP)*” that sets a strong performance goal to clear the highway quickly.
- Develop *policies and guidelines for handling and clearing vehicle fluid spills* and other unusual debris.
- Consider *innovative programs for towing and wrecker services*, such as payment based on performance, not time, and ensure the quality of such services through a training and certification program.

Procedures

- Adopt *incident scene management practices* that protect responders and minimize disruption to traffic.
- Develop comprehensive *notification and resource guides* to identify who (by name or at least by position) needs to be notified for various types and severity of incidents.
- Develop *operational procedures for secondary responders* to minimize the delay in dispatching these resources while maximizing the quality of information provided.
- Adopt *incident investigation procedures* that minimize the time that investigators must be physically on the incident scene. Several emerging investigatory tools are available for quick and effective mapping of crash or crime scenes.
- Institute a formal, systematic process for *post-event debriefs* for serious incidents and standardized severe incident assessment tools.
- Utilize *Enhanced Wireless 911* technologies within emergency call centers, while providing location reference markers (LRMs) to aid motorists and call takers in identifying incident locations, and assisting responders in quickly getting to the scene.
- Provide well-designed *incident investigation sites* off the roadway, and preferably out of sight of the traveled lanes, where parties involved in incidents can clear the roadway and carry out their business in a safe manner and not interfere with the normal traffic.
- Provide *safe median crossovers* with appropriate protection for official vehicles using them, but designed to discourage public misuse.
- Provide for more *frequent access by responder vehicles* to permit fire rescue, EMS, wreckers, and even helicopters to reach the scenes more quickly and safely.

Partnerships

- Develop a strong state-level *policy-setting partnership* among the State DOT, State Police, the State Department of Environmental Regulation, and the Governor's Highway Safety Representative. The latter can be an effective advocate in the political context.
- Form *multi-agency traffic incident management (TIM) teams*, which should be the focal points for policy, guidelines, and best practices development.
- Develop *multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional joint operations protocols* that clearly lay out a joint vision and mission; goals and objectives; and agency roles, responsibilities, resources, and financing.
- Create *innovative public-public and public-private partnerships* that facilitate TIM activities and provide adequate resources for all responsibilities to be carried out, and to permit diversion of traffic into other jurisdictions to relieve an incident-impacted facility.
- Develop *agreements with other impacted agencies*, such as Medical Examiners, hospitals, hazardous materials handlers, etc., to give incident responders appropriate authority to act independently of, or in partnership with, these other parties to achieve clearance goals, including the removal of deceased persons from the roadway.
- Create *multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional traffic and emergency management centers* that integrate the transportation and public safety functions of the agencies involved.

Promotion

- Develop *interagency training programs* to spread best practices for incident scene response, management, and clearance. A formal TIM *certification process* would strengthen programs.
- Develop *public outreach programs* to educate the general public and encourage their lawful and appropriate actions during incidents.

Performance Measures

- Create or expand *TIM performance measures*, including the continuous collection and analysis of supporting data, and a structured way of reporting performance.
- Stress *accountability as a central theme* of this performance effort.

Prudent Investments

- Create *freeway service patrols* that are sponsored by the state, toll authority or private sector.
- Provide for *inter-agency, inter-jurisdictional communications networks* where all responders can communicate with one another.

Regulatory and Statutory Best Practices

These practices are those that require a formal rule-making process or legislation. They include such requirements as the common “move-it” laws, or the protection of responders from exposure to liability.

- Formally *certify towing and wrecker services*, including both operators and equipment.
- *Adopt “Move-It” laws*. This is one of the most important actions that drivers themselves can take to avoid congestion and secondary incidents, but they must be empowered by law to do so.

- Adopt a law *allowing incident responders to direct the removal of fatal victims, their vehicles, and property* from the traveled way or even right of way, immediately upon completion of the preliminary investigation.
- Adopt laws to reduce or *remove any liability from incident responders for performing their duties*, considering resources available. This should cover both public- and private-sector responders.
- Conform to the new *National Incident Management System (NIMS)* established by a Homeland Security Presidential Directive, which requires all agencies to operate within NIMS guidelines⁴.

How the Coalition Can Continue to Help

While QC/MI programs must be established at the state level, at the request of its members, the Coalition will continue to facilitate interstate collaboration - including policies, regulations, and laws - to encourage uniformity to the extent possible throughout the Corridor. Through the Coordinated Incident Management Program Track and the Safety Task Force, the following practices will be encouraged:

- Creation of institutional structures for coordinated inter-agency traffic incident management through management committees, regional TIM Teams, and other cooperative forums.
- Formalization of interagency agreements and Joint Operating Agreements that spell out goals, objectives, roles, and responsibilities.
- Creation of a TIM Certification and Training Program to ensure uniform, interagency training and qualification.
- Electronic linkage of regional TMC's, emergency call taking/dispatch centers, and Emergency operations centers to share TIM real time data.
- Co-location of TMCs, Law Enforcement Dispatch Centers, and others to facilitate TIM, particularly response, quick clearance, and recovery.
- Create public outreach programs to educate the general public about TIM best practices.

As the report details, six current Coalition states have adopted “move-it” laws. From the Coalition’s QC/MI report and NCHRP synthesis, it is suggested that the following would constitute a “model” set of stop and move-it laws:

- Driver Stop Law:
 - Whenever possible, drivers involved in any crash, regardless of severity (including fatal crashes), must stop and, if necessary, return to the scene of the crash and then remain at the scene until all legal obligations have been fulfilled.
 - Such stops shall not obstruct traffic in any way.

⁴Note that NIMS was issued after the publication of the QC/MI report, but is included in this Executive Summary because of its potential impact on TIM practices.

- Move-it Law:
 - Any driver able to do so safely and who is physically able to do so shall move a crash vehicle (and debris) off the traveled way (and if possible the shoulder or median) on any class of highway as quickly as possible so long as further risk of injury is not imposed.
 - If the driver cannot move the vehicle, he or she shall seek assistance in doing so.
 - Any traffic or public safety responder shall be empowered to move any disabled vehicle and debris from the traveled way in as safe and efficient manner possible.
 - In all such cases, if a frontage road, cross street, accident investigation site, or other safe haven is available, these are preferable to the median, shoulder, sidewalk, or clear zone.
 - In all such cases, both drivers and responders shall be immune from liability for the lawful and conscientious execution of these actions.
 - Similarly, when such actions are not prudent, drivers and responders shall be immune from liability for deliberately not undertaking such action when the risk of further damage or injury dictates.

Adoption of a strong clearance policy—generally the open roads policy—is the second major thrust of this work. The ideal open roads policy would include the following provisions:

- Set an aggressive state/region-wide goal for clearing the roadways to serve as the basis for all supporting QC/MI best practices.
- Develop and monitor performance measures related to efficiency of response, incident duration and clearance times.
- Encourage the adoption of the ORP at all levels of jurisdiction, from state to local levels.
- Provide all administrative measures possible to enable all responders to perform their tasks speedily and without interference.
- Consider incentives for towing and wrecker services to clear the roadway quickly.

In conclusion, the recommendations in this report are consistent with, and based on, the best practices found in a number of Coalition and other states. It is essential that Coalition members continue to be proactive in their management of the operation of their facilities. Coalition members are already achieving significant successes in TIM initiatives and a consistent regional program will ensure predictable motorist expectations—and compliance—among travelers throughout the region, and ensure that the I-95 Corridor is one of the safest corridors in the nation.