Summary of Lessons Learned from Pentagon Attack

The events of September 11, 2001 were a test of the Virginia Department of Transportation’s organization, training and preparedness for emergency response to man made disasters. This test was made all the more demanding by the proximity of the event to the national capitol region, with all of the complications in protocol, information exchange and authority delineation that such proximity entails. In general, the Department passed the test with flying colors, however, as with any incident of magnitude, events revealed areas in which organization, equipment, training and procedures could stand improvement. An analysis of the response to and recovery from the Pentagon attack has been completed, with results as delineated in the following paragraphs.

Actions immediately following the attack:

VDOT was at “normal peacetime” readiness on September 11th, and a routine rush hour in Northern Virginia was just drawing to a close as the first airliners were crashing into the World Trade Towers in New York. The Statewide Transportation Emergency Operations Center (TEOC) was in the process of implementing a statewide terrorism alert via the Virginia Operational information System (VOIS) in response to the New York events when the third aircraft flew directly over the Smart Traffic Center (STC) in Northern Virginia enroute to its impact at the Pentagon. With this impact, VDOT went to the highest state of readiness and responded to the incident. The following is an edited list of immediate actions by VDOT after the attacks:

- Statewide, VDOT responded to the incidents rapidly and effectively. Response was based upon existing emergency plans, which are based on the “All Hazards” principle, thus being appropriate for a wide variety of circumstances.

- Central Office Transportation Emergency Operations Center augmented to full staffing, and coordinated statewide information and activities throughout the events. TEOC also assured adequate flow of information to State EOC and Governor’s office.

- NoVa STC immediately took action to make itself available to the military as a command post for dealing with the Pentagon incident. Military used STC as a joint command post for duration of incident.

- NoVa District augmented STC, SSP and traffic control assets to facilitate clearance of DC area. Signal coordination, suspension of construction lane closures and opening of HOV lanes were immediately implemented. Special traffic arrangements remain in place to deal with traffic issues.
• Essential rescue and recovery equipment requested by authorities at the Pentagon incident site was provided in a rapid and effective way. This included 21 sets of portable lights to facilitate rescue work through the night at the Pentagon.

• Hampton Roads District implemented preplanned security enhancements in conjunction with VSP to help safeguard essential infrastructure in Hampton Roads District. Security enhancements remain in effect until further notice.

• STC Hampton Roads coordinated closely with military authorities to ensure optimum access to and egress from area military bases. Close coordination continues to mitigate traffic effects of increased security at bases.

• Tiger teams from Culpeper District were deployed to assist NoVa District with coping with effects of incidents.

• VDOT’s representative to the Governor’s Terrorism Task Force met with other members of the Task Force to provide transportation input to actions recommended to Governor.

• VDOT continues to develop ways to meet the current and anticipated future situations in coordination with other appropriate state and federal agencies.

Post incident analysis of VDOT response to 911 events:

All significant incidents are the subject of post incident analysis by agreement among the responsible state agencies. Normally the agencies involved are the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM), the Virginia State Police (VSP), VDOT and local public safety agencies as appropriate (e.g. Fire, rescue, police etc.). In the case of the September 11th incidents, the post incident analysis was statewide, though focused in large part on Northern Virginia. The following edited list of transportation specific lessons learned was developed from this analysis:

Things that worked well
NoVa District
• Smart Traffic Center (STC) stayed open with undegraded operations during the attack.
• STC provided Command Center for military.
• STC relayed information to TEOC via VOIS.
• Safety Service Patrol (SSP) coordinated with VDEM and Pentagon for equipment.
• SSP coordinated with TEOC the request for tiger team assistance.
• STC coordinated HOV openings with Virginia State Police.
• TSS coordinated traffic signals with Arlington County and City of Fairfax to facilitate vehicle movement down major corridors.
• SSP provided traffic control for early release of federal employees.
• Organized conference call with surrounding jurisdictions dealing with relevant business decisions.

Transportation Emergency Operations Center
• Coordinated statewide response to terrorist attack.
• Provided situation reports to VDOT staff on terrorists’ attacks.
• Requested deployment of traffic control tiger team from Culpeper District.
• Coordinated Mission Assignments from Virginia Department of Emergency Management.
• Worked closely with Office of Community & Public Affairs on rumor control.
• VOIS was used to report emergency and traffic conditions.

Richmond District
• Smart Traffic Center provided liaisons to State Emergency Operations Center.
• STC provided signage and HAR messages advising northbound travelers of the traffic situation Washington DC on 9/11/01.
• Coordinated with all the military installations on traffic in and around facilities.

Hampton Roads District
• Coordinated with Virginia State Police to increase security at all bridge-tunnels.
• Reported traffic back-ups resulting from increased security checks at military installations.
• Worked with Surry Nuclear Power Station by providing equipment to limit access to facility.
• Coordinated with all the military installations on traffic in and around facilities.

Things that need further work

NoVa Smart Traffic Center

*Issue:* Cellular phones, radios and pagers periodically went down as a result of circuit overload and military blackout.

**Recommendation:** The need to lease more specialized communication devices such as combination cellular phone, two-way radio and pager (Nextel) and satellite telephones for external communications.

*Issue:* Existing Smart Traffic Center is old, does not lend itself to the future needs of the region.

**Recommendation:** Develop and build a centralized unified district command facility.

*Issue:* Need teleconferencing equipment in the Smart Traffic Center.

**Recommendation:** Purchase state-of-the-art teleconferencing equipment for the Smart Traffic Center.
**Issue:** No plan in place to provide Continuity of Operations should the Smart Traffic Center be damaged or destroyed.

**Recommendation:** Develop and implement a Continuity of Operations Plan for STC.

**Issue:** Need interoperability guidelines for contact and interaction with the military.

**Recommendation:** Develop in conjunction with the military, a standard operating procedure for response to incidents and emergencies that impact the Northern Virginia/Washington DC area.

**Issue:** Need ability to see large area of district for traffic flow analysis.

**Recommendation:** Work with surrounding jurisdictions to develop an aerial helicopter camera link to the Smart Traffic Center.

**Issue:** Establish protocol for obtaining additional resources from within District and from neighboring Districts.

**Recommendation:** Develop list of equipment and location of equipment within the District. Refer to SOP for Tiger Teams for assistance outside of District.

**Issue:** Need to review procedures for communications between TEOC and all districts.

**Recommendation:** Review existing communications protocols with TEOC and develop a personnel exchange program to increase understanding of roles by both entities.

**Transportation Emergency Operations Center**

**Issue:** Unable to contact NoVa Smart Traffic Center by voice communications immediately after Pentagon attack.

**Recommendation:** Develop a statewide strategy to improve communications during disasters that could include satellite telephones, improve radio communication, and/or redundant pager capabilities.

**Issue:** Processing the amount and often-conflicting information received in TEOC.

**Recommendation:** Assign a Chief Information Officer for each shift so that all information received in TEOC is validated and passed on to all appropriate personnel.

**Issue:** Continue to work closely with the Community & Public Affairs office to get the most up to date and accurate information out to the public.

**Recommendation:** TEOC to contact Community & Public Affairs office and provide them with a contact person for liaison purposes.

**Summary of Lessons Learned from Pentagon Attack-continued**

**Issue:** TEOC was not aware that all construction activities had been halted statewide on the day of the attack so did not mention the fact in any Situation Reports.

**Recommendation:** Any operational issues relating to the disaster should be forwarded to TEOC so that they can be addressed in the Situation Reports.
**Issue:** Dealing with rumor control issues such as the Virginia borders were closed to hazardous material shipments. A lot of time and effort goes into responding to these rumors.

**Recommendation:** Work closely with the Office of Community & Public Affairs to track these rumors to their source and stop them before they get to widespread.

**Issue:** All the federal employees in Washington DC were released from work without any consultation with the surrounding states with respect to traffic management.

**Recommendation:** A point of contact with the federal Office of Personnel Management must be established so that office closings can be passed on to VDOT.

**Issue:** TEOC is responsible for coordinating action with all departments that fall under the Secretary of Transportation, which includes Aviation, Ports, Motor Vehicles and Rail and Public Transportation.

**Recommendation:** TEOC needs to rapidly make contact with all agencies under the Secretary of Transportation and establish procedures for reporting during disasters.