

WATER TRANSIT AUTHORITY



WTA

Press Release – April 12, 2006

FERRIES TO THE RESCUE: DISASTER RESPONSE PLANNING

Ferry Operators have a long history of responding to local disasters. In 23 years ferries have replaced damaged or disrupted transportation links in the Bay Area. New and increased ferry service was used in 1989 to transport passengers and supplies after the Loma Prieta Earthquake. The San Francisco Bay Area Water Transit Authority, the regional public agency responsible for building and operating a comprehensive ferry system in the bay area, is working to ensure that ferry service continues to play an important role in transporting workers across the Bay in a disaster.

The good news is that since Loma Prieta the number of vessels used for ferry service increased from 6 vessels to 13 vessels, which improves ferry capacity to assist during a disaster recovery period. Adding privately-owned tour and excursion boats, which are available to provide mutual assistance, boats could accommodate over 17,000 seats in an emergency (see attached ferry service inventory).

To further increase emergency response capabilities, the WTA is working to implement the Regional Ferry Plan. The Regional Ferry Plan includes eight new routes to provide cost effective congestion relief and mobility improvements to the Bay Area's transportation system. The additional vessels and terminals in that plan would allow the Bay Areas ferries to carry over 20,000 trips per hour during a response to disaster, a ten fold increase over the ferry capacity immediately after Loma Prieta.

In the interim, the WTA's goal is to push for greater flexibility in deploying existing vessels in the event of a disaster. Currently, there is a shortage of dock capacity at key locations, and additional facilities are needed to realize the Bay Area's full capacity of existing ferry fleet. WTA's CEO Steve Castleberry explains that "vessels should be deployed to the most critical corridor where they are most needed in a disaster by using a mix of temporary and permanent terminals to add capacity where needed."

In addition to efforts to expand the ferry system, there is now better documented and coordinated recovery planning in the works. A Trans Response Plan (TRP) is now in place identifying MTC as the Regional Transportation Clearinghouse during an emergency. A key element of the TRP is the Regional Maritime Contingency Plan. This Plan provides guidelines and procedures for expanding the water transit system in the San Francisco Bay Area in the recovery phase of a region-wide disaster of any type. The WTA will be coordinating water transit recovery efforts for water transit providers and is updating the Maritime Contingency Plan in coordination with the Golden Gate Bridge District, Ferry Boat Operators, and MTC.

For further information on WTA's Regional Ferry Plan go to www.watertransit.org or contact Shirley Douglas, WTA Community Relations Manager at Douglas @watertransit.org.

