



U.S. Department of Transportation  
Federal Transit Administration



# National Study on Carless and Special Needs Populations

## Mobilizing Your Community for Emergency Evacuation

### Background

A primary challenge of evacuation planning is understanding how to assist, reach, and educate various populations for emergency preparedness and evacuation procedures. Of special interest are those populations who are carless or who have unique needs, including those who are minority, low-income, older, disabled, and limited English proficient (LEP).

### Objectives

The objective of this study was to research how state departments of transportation (state DOTs), metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), transit agencies, and local governments are considering, in the context of their emergency preparedness planning, the unique needs of carless and special needs populations.

### Findings and Conclusions

*Evacuating carless and special needs populations during emergencies requires significant planning, collaboration, coordination, and outreach.*

The report is divided into three sections: “A Guidebook for Vulnerable Populations,” “Vulnerable Populations Planning Workbook,” and “Summary of Stakeholder Workshops,” which includes case studies.

The guidebook includes information on the planning process, key planning elements, process evaluation, recommendations, and resources.

The workbook assists in pre-event preparation and includes checklists for planning, outreach, and evaluation.

The stakeholder workshops addressed questions on challenges, strengths and resources, cross-jurisdictional relationships, and evacuation training and planning. For all cities, outreach and identification were noted as the greatest challenges. Participants indicated that while the dissemination of information is critical during an emergency, reaching vulnerable populations is quite difficult. Low participation rates during evacuations and cross-jurisdictional collaboration were also noted as major challenges.

The case studies examined the existing planning efforts and publicly-available plans addressing carless and special needs evacuation in Chicago, Miami, New Orleans, New York, and San Francisco. In Chicago, planning efforts focus on terrorism and radiological emergencies, relying on the use of simulations and exercises. In New York City, planning efforts focus primarily on terrorism and coastal storms. Public education efforts cover a wide range of circumstances or possible events and are offered in the widest variety of languages than any other city's plans. In Miami and New Orleans, emergency plans focus mainly on the threat posed by hurricanes and involve coordinated public transit and paratransit efforts to evacuate carless and special needs people effectively. Strengths in both cities revolve around the experience and management of logistics, particularly among organizations, agencies, and regions. In San Francisco, planning focuses primarily on earthquakes, and the city accounts for community-based resources in its planning efforts through a concept called the "community-hub," which brings together organizations and resources.

## Benefits

Reviewing and learning from the emergency evacuation preparation plans of major U.S. cities and providing evacuation preparedness, planning, outreach, and evaluation guidance for carless and special needs populations can enhance the safety of these populations during emergencies.

## Project Information

### FTA Report No. 0067

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