

MEMORANDUM

To: Traffic Incident Management Group

From: Tom Reinauer, Transportation Director

Date: March 17, 2008

RE: After Action Report – I-95 Bridge incident on October 16th 2007

A Post-Incident Review meeting was held on February 19th, 2008. Those in attendance included:

Martin Calawa – Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) NH Office; John Cannell – MaineDOT Region One; Tim Cusick – MaineDOT Region One; Julia Dawson – Southern Maine Regional Planning Commission (SMRPC); Andrew Donovan – Maine State Police; Kevin Donovan – Maine State Police; Gary Eaton – Kittery PD; David Ferland – Portsmouth PD; Jon Hanson – New Hampshire DOT/Turnpike; Arthur Murdock – Maine State Police; Jeffrey Naum – MaineDOT; Tom Reinauer – SMRPC; Greg Stone – Maine Turnpike Authority.

Type of incident: Suspicious package (backpack) located on Interstate 95 “High Level” bridge over the Piscataqua River between Portsmouth, NH and Kittery, ME.

Date of incident: October 16, 2007

Summary of events:

- Ø New Hampshire DOT bridge maintenance staff called in a report of a suspicious item, which appeared to be a bag of some sort. The bag, which was discovered to be a backpack, was lodged in a peculiar location under a portion of the I-95 bridge structure. It appeared that someone had accessed the area via the catwalk and either placed or threw the bag into the location.
- Ø NH DOT contacted the NH State Police, who responded, inspected the item, and notified the NH State Police Bomb Squad. The Squad responded, took over incident command and proceeded to assess the situation and secure the scene.
- Ø NH DOT contacted both the MaineDOT and the Maine Turnpike Authority to notify them of the incident. They also contacted the City of Portsmouth.
- Ø NH State Police contacted the Maine State Police and requested assistance for traffic control on the north end of the bridge. This call occurred at 10:58. Maine State Police responded with a detail and staged their vehicles off the bridge, on the northern side, at the request of the incident commander. Their role was to provide traffic control support if needed, and to assist in closing lanes of traffic if deemed necessary.
- Ø The Maine State Police contacted the Kittery Police Department (they typically contact any municipalities that may be involved in an incident along the Turnpike), and maintained phone contact with the incident commander and also the Kittery Police Department.
- Ø The Maine Turnpike Authority contacted MaineDOT (as is their protocol for notification).
- Ø The incident commander made a decision that there was no need to shut down any more lanes of the bridge than were required for their immediate needs at the scene. Any closure would occur when the package was lifted onto the roadway to be X-rayed.
- Ø MaineDOT set up a staging area at the northern end of the bridge with minimal traffic disruption, and adequate room for emergency vehicles.

- Ø The Kittery Fire Department responded to the northern end of the bridge, and staged vehicles in such a way to block several lanes of the highway. Maine State Police attempted to explain the support role requested by the incident commander, but were unsuccessful in repositioning the fire equipment. At some point during this process, the Fire Department left the scene.
- Ø The incident commander notified MaineDOT at 12:40 and requested that all traffic lanes should be closed while the backpack was lifted onto the roadway and inspected/X-rayed. This was done, and traffic was stopped for approximately 3-5 minutes.
- Ø Prior to moving the bag, the incident commander requested the return of the Kittery Fire Department to the scene, in case of any injuries at the site during the inspection. However, the Fire Department did not respond. It is unclear why the Department did not respond.
- Ø MaineDOT received word from the incident commander and opened up the lanes once it was discovered the bag was not a threat. There was some confusion at this point whether MaineDOT needed approval from the DOT Augusta office to open the lanes to traffic and that the MaineDOT contact was waiting for a call back from that office. However, this was a miscommunication, as the call was never made and no approval from Augusta was required.
- Ø The incident was cleared and all lanes of traffic opened by 13:20.

Highlights and/or areas of success for this particular incident:

- Ø The detours that were set up for the incident worked very well.
- Ø Coordination between the two States was outstanding.
- Ø The level of emergency response and disruption of traffic were appropriate for the incident.
- Ø Communication with the Coast Guard and their response to the incident was very good.
- Ø Staging of vehicles at either end of the bridge worked well and reduced exposure to responding agencies.

Areas which were determined to be in need of improvement:

- Ø It was unclear who the proper contact was for the City of Portsmouth. The City Manager received a call, but this person may not be the proper contact depending on the incident.
- Ø There appeared to be some time delay in communications between the incident commander at the scene and that person's superior who was not located at the scene. It was unclear whether this was due to a policy regarding the decisions that had to be made at the scene.
- Ø A lack of an adequate common frequency between agencies and States was a primary concern for everyone who responded to the incident.
- Ø At times, it was unclear which agency someone was representing at the scene due to a lack of identification (either "on person" or verbal).
- Ø The current OSHA Guidelines for the location/staging of vehicles during incidents may be creating confusion for local Fire Departments, and may also not work well or be the best option on the Interstate.
- Ø There was concern expressed regarding the use and reliability of cell phones for emergency responders during incidents. Overloading of the cell towers due to increased use by motorists, and adequate signal off-site for responders not in the immediate area were noted as particular concerns

Recommendations:

- Ø Organize a meeting with the Kittery Fire Department, the Maine State Police, and OSHA to review guidelines on vehicle placement during incidents and discuss the bridge incident.

- Ø Once OSHA guidelines are revised, work with communities along the Maine Turnpike/Interstate 95 to distribute new information.
- Ø Reconvene the ME-NH Traffic Incident Management Group's communications subcommittee to review current technology, radio equipment, frequencies, etc., and work toward improving interstate and interagency communications.