

King County Office of Emergency Management Podcasts ***Disasters: Are you ready?***

Number one priority is transportation

If you were faced with a disaster on the scale of Katrina, what would your priorities be for the restoration of critical services? Is it communications systems, utilities like electric power, or perhaps the transportation system?

In our critical infrastructure planning and the use of Homeland Security funds we have focused on the electrical industry as one that is a high priority for hardening and protecting because of the widespread interdependencies that are caused by electrical power outages. We saw some of those interdependencies revealed in our last windstorm.

Today I'd like to share my case for transportation as being the most critical need for restoration versus other important needs.

I see the issue as being one of freedom of movement throughout a region. Even during the December 2006 Windstorm we saw issues with transportation in the region. During the height of the windstorm on the night of December 14-15, when I heard that I-405 was closed due to downed trees, I knew it must be pretty bad in the region as a whole.

The crux of the problem is that if you can't reach critical infrastructure to restore it, therefore making that critical infrastructure a priority doesn't do you any good. One of the most significant and detrimental aspects of our Central Puget Sound Region is the funneling of transportation systems along limited North-South, and only a few East-West corridors.

We are bounded by the Puget Sound in the West, separated by Lake Washington in the middle (at least for King County itself) and then boxed in by the Cascade Mountains in the East. Moving people and goods is difficult even on a good day, imagine what it will be like in a disaster that takes out even one of the major routes. Where will 100K

cars and trucks go? With all roads at or exceeding their designed capacity we are simply doomed to an extremely difficult existence for up to six months, if we lose just one bridge during the next earthquake.

This is why we need to make transportation the key aspect of any disaster restoration and recovery planning process. We need to look at every mode of transportation for some form of assistance, marine and air. However, none of the other systems have the same carrying capacity as our ground transportation system.

Determining alternate routes and setting priorities for reconstruction and recovery processes are just two of the actions that can help us get back on our feet as a region. The time to start this planning is now, not at some point in the future. All the dialog about the Alaskan Way Viaduct and the 520 Bridge is interesting to read about and listen to, but there are a multitude of other vulnerabilities to our surface transportation that are equally at risk and receiving little or no attention.

That's my case for Transportation being the number one priority. Do you agree, or disagree?