

Public Communications Plan Summary
H-GAC Traffic Incident Management Support

Traffic Incident Management (TIM) benefits us all. Clear roadways keep commerce moving, enhance air quality, and save lives.

While motorists and community leaders understand the frustration and down-time costs associated with traffic incidents, the benefits realized through a comprehensive TIM program are not as widely recognized.

In addition, the SafeClear and MAP vehicle clearance strategies have confused motorists and disillusioned policymakers with overlapping jurisdictions, inconsistent fee structures, limited availability and lack of a central managing entity. Formation of a new cohesive strategy that replaces both SafeClear and MAP presents a welcomed opportunity for creating a brand that, through its very name, will project the value and positive impact of traffic incident management.

This plan encompasses a broad scope of public value through development of communication strategies that:

- promote and gain public/stakeholder support for the value and positive impact of a comprehensive regional TIM program
- promote and gain support from target audiences (policy makers, businesses, and general public) for benefits and value of a new vehicle quick-clearance strategy

Objective

Gain stakeholder and public support for development of a comprehensive TIM program that is led by one central entity responsible for management, training, communication and coordination.

Key Message:

The Houston Regional TIM program must be ongoing; include multi-agency participation, and be supported by dedicated staff to maximize its effectiveness.

Supporting Messages:

- One entity will be responsible for coordinating activities and strategies associated with the Houston Regional TIM Program, including:
 - supporting administration of quick clearance services
 - organizing and conducting incident After-Action Reviews (AARs)
 - addressing ongoing TIM issues and needs
 - assessing TIM benefits and measuring and monitoring TIM performance

- All disciplines with TIM responsibilities, including fire and law enforcement, will have active representation as a team member of the Houston Regional TIM program.

Strategy A

The public's appreciation for the value of a TIM coordinated effort will most likely be translated through its understanding and exposure to the quick clearance strategy. Therefore, the rebranded strategy should serve as the conduit for communicating TIM messages to the public.

Tactics

- Include TIM program information and organizational structure in quick clearance launch materials so as to present a cohesive unified team
- Include TIM program information and organizational structure, as appropriate, on marketing, media, online and website materials

Strategy B

The public's primary interest in a Regional TIM program will be how it benefits individual motorists, and the community as a whole.

Tactics

- Release public reporting of achieved performance measurements and improvements on a regular basis and post as content on dedicated website.

Key Message:

Responder safety is an important component of an effective TIM program.

Supporting Messages:

- TIM responders risk their safety everyday responding to emergencies on the region's roadways.
- The public plays an important role in TIM responder safety and preventing hundreds of deaths among law enforcement, fire, EMS, towing and recovery transportation personnel each year.
- TIM training provides responders with the knowledge, materials and tools they need to do their jobs safely and effectively.
- Multi-agency, multi-disciplinary TIM training is essential for a team-based approach to managing traffic incidents.

Strategy A

The Texas Move Over/Slow Down law, which has been expanded to include tow trucks, is not well known or complied with by motorists. It is recommended that the Houston Regional TIM Program conduct an on-going public campaign, in association with its re-branded vehicle clearance strategy that a) promotes the state's Move Over/Slow Down law; and b) increases public appreciation for the risks TIM responders take in assisting motorists.

Tactics

- Produce both television and radios spots in English and Spanish that achieve maximum impressions through a planned media buy.
- Work with representatives of area rental car franchises, automobile service garages, dealerships, and driving education and defensive driving schools to conceptualize

- Collateral materials (eg. stickers for adhering to rental car contracts or service receipts, classroom posters, etc.) that will effectively promote the law.
- Partner with TIM responder organizations to promote the campaign’s messages, particularly at press conferences or in media interviews related to responder incidents.

Strategy B

Making TIM Responder safety a priority not only enhances collaboration and support among the Houston Regional TIM Program’s participants, it is a reflection of the standards by which the program intends to operate. Successful outcomes from implementing a Strategic Highway Research Program 2 (SHRP2) TIM training program will be directly impacted by responder attendance and participation.

Tactics

- Place articles that feature benefits experienced by other regions where SHRP2 TIM training has been implemented, such as San Antonio, in responder association sites and newsletters, including www.Local341.org (the official site of the Houston Professional Fire Fighter Association.)
- Use initiation of training program to generate media coverage of life-saving benefits to responders and the injury/death statistics to be reversed.
- As training program proceeds, develop testimonial stories from responders who have experienced on-the-job benefits to participating for placement in professional association sites and newsletters, and to include in training notification materials.
- Identify local and regional conferences for responders to speak or share the training information

Key Message:

Strategies for the regional TIM program will be implemented in phases, beginning with the City of Houston and Harris County, followed by surrounding counties and/or freeway segments, depending on need and funding availability.

Supporting Messages:

- A participatory partnership with impacted agencies adjacent to Harris County is a priority of the Houston Regional TIM program.
- Shared knowledge and expanded interaction benefits everyone.

Strategy A

The public’s primary interest in the TIM program will be through exposure to the quick clearance strategy. To avoid confusion and provide education, the public will need to understand the benefits and objectives of TIM enhancement strategies, including the projected timeline for implementation of the quick clearance strategy by county, following implementation in Harris County, including Fort Bend, Montgomery, Brazoria, Galveston, and Waller.

Tactics:

- Develop public education materials and concise timeline for distribution via media, business, civic, stakeholder and influencer channels in neighboring counties and/or geographic areas as they become active, including:
 - Posters
 - Trifold brochure

- Bumper stickers
- Glove-box break-down instruction card
- Utility bill inserts
- Direct mail print piece
- Develop a visual that illustrates inclusion phases of TIM program (similar to H-GAC zip-map for hurricane evacuation) and include as content in dedicated website and in educational materials.
- Utilize digital billboards to promote expansion of quick clearance strategy as expansion areas go live since most digital billboards are located in areas outside of Central Houston
- Utilize zoned TxDOT digital signage to promote expansion of quick clearance strategy as expansion areas go live.
- Identify community event opportunities for distribution of materials as areas are phased in to program, including:
 - town hall meetings
 - existing city, county, community events
- Customize media relations messages for each county and/or freeway segment as area becomes part of the program including:
 - Press conference with city and county officials
 - Press release
 - Initiate interviews with media focused on the geographic area

Objective

Acquire stakeholder support and public appreciation for re-branded vehicle clearance strategy to achieve optimal traffic incident management outcomes and enhance safety and mobility.

Key Message:

A free, re-branded quick clearance strategy that builds on the success of the SafeClear model is essential for an effective Houston Regional TIM program. (See Appendix)

Supporting Messages:

- A vehicle quick clearance strategy significantly reduces delays in traffic flow, release of fuel emissions, potential for secondary traffic incidents, and, most importantly, saves lives.
- Confusion between other existing services, jurisdictions of operation, and negative effects of SAFEClear's conversion to a fee-for-service program, makes re-branding an important strategy for achieving public acceptance, understanding, compliance, and optimal outcomes.
- The SafeClear model of contracted quick clearance by zoned segments of freeway is an effective and efficient model worth continuing.

Strategy A

Given the confusion about the past and current clearance program, it will be imperative to create a comprehensive campaign that quickly and clearly educates the public on the program, it's costs, it's geographic boundaries and how best to respond to an incident on the freeway systems. The campaign must be county wide and reach those outside of Harris

County that commutes to the area. The campaign should communicate cross culturally and in multiple languages (including the five languages the City of Houston will provide information on recently announced). The messaging should focus on the basic benefits of the program: safety impact, economic impact, environmental impact and that the free program is available without a direct cost to the public.

Tactics:

- Develop a comprehensive media relations plan to launch the new program including:
 - A print and electronic media kit of materials that provide detailed information about the TIM program
 - Request a presentation with the editorial board of the Houston Chronicle for editorial support
 - Schedule additional one-on-one presentations with the largest media outlets, including major television networks, radio groups, and include traffic and city reporters.
 - Host a press conference with all participating entities represented
 - Conduct media outreach and interviews
 - Develop a crisis communications plan in the event of a major incident with the program
 - Conduct story placement for print, digital, radio, television, bloggers
 - Development of feature story pitches and soft news to demonstrate success of the program
 - Prepare key spokespeople for each facet of the program, including officials, tow truck drivers, emergency responders, and more.
 - Determine calendar of media activities for overall program for calendar year
 - Develop key media partnerships with publications that reach travelers: such as Texas Highways, AAA magazine
 - Develop informational articles and content that can be distributed to commuter newsletters and publications
 - Develop consistent key messaging to be used in response to negative press, questions, online postings.
- Develop a central source for information via a dedicated, interactive, informative website
 - Include an informational point-of-service video on the home page that concisely conveys basic information about the program
 - Include an interactive or zip map that allows visitor's to quickly and easily find information by geographic location.
 - Develop graphics that are easy to understand to demonstrate the program's measurable results in safety, lives saved, economic impact, environmental impact (USA Today type graphics)
 - Provide a FAQ: frequently asked questions section
 - Consider an interactive forum for questions and answers from citizens
- Develop and distribute branded collateral materials
 - Produce a glove-box break-down information card explaining what to do in an incident
 - Produce print materials for distribution at all public facilities such as City Hall, Libraries:
 - Informative posters

- Tri-fold brochure
 - Bumper stickers
- Utilize utility bills for print and digital stuffers: electric, water, cable, gas, phone
- Develop paycheck stuffers and make available to major employers
- Produce a direct mail piece for mass distribution
- Distribute materials to all HAR and all Houston area realtors for new resident packages
- Develop an advertising campaign:
 - Utilize the following outdoor advertising channels:
 - Billboards
 - Taxi signs
 - Metro buses and light rail trains
 - Produce both television and radios spots that achieve maximum impressions through a planned media buy
 - Utilize online advertising channels for major media outlets
- Develop a comprehensive social media campaign plan
 - Twitter
 - Facebook
 - LinkedIn
 - Other government channels
- Partner with government agencies for email and cell phone alerts to public
- Conduct town hall meetings to answer specific public questions regarding the program
- Develop a calendar for participation at all city, county and community events, at which law enforcement or emergency management are exhibiting, sponsoring, speaking or participating
- Garner feedback from the public via a public online and email survey once the program has launched to measure opinion, service, and impact on them personally.

Strategy B

The business community has a particular interest in the economic impact of TIM programs. Demonstrating the quick clearance strategy's direct link to increased traffic flow, fewer lost work hours, and subsequent economic benefits on business should be proactively shared with employers, as well as employees.

Tactics:

- Post economic impact data on the dedicated website
- Include economic impact highlights in communications, collateral material, social media, and media relations where appropriate.
- Provide email and newsletter content, print collateral material, and PowerPoint presentation templates to large businesses for communicating to their employees
- TIM representatives should make presentations to area Chambers of Commerce and major employers (including School Districts and large government employers) with collateral materials for distribution
- TIM representatives should reach out to Homeowner and Civic associations to garner support and partner for distribution of materials

Key Message:

Towing and recovery companies contracted according to strict performance requirements and specifications will perform quick clearance services at the direction of law enforcement and the Regional TIM Program

Supporting Messages:

- Law enforcement presence facilitates quick clearance, improves safety, increases mobility and promotes public compliance.

Strategy A

In general, the towing industry does not enjoy a high level of public opinion. However, by making the rigorous selection process of contracted [SafeClear] responders a part of the program's public awareness messages, a higher standard of professionalism and motorist expectation can be achieved.

Tactics

- Whenever possible, include fact that contracted [SafeClear] responders have satisfied a rigorous selection process in communication tools produced to educate the public, including press releases, and web content.
- Visibly brand [SafeClear] responders with new logo design in truck signage, safety vests, hats, shirts, and personnel badges.

Strategy B

Public understanding of the central role law enforcement plays in the [SafeClear] strategy, including authorization of each clearance response, and in-the-field management of traffic incidents, will enhance trust in the program. It will also help redefine the public's expectations of the Harris County Sheriff's Department to provide courtesy patrol services, such as fixing flats and providing fuel under the Motorist Assistance Program (MAP), to responsibilities more focused on freeway patrol and scene management.

Tactics

- Include law enforcement representation from the Houston Police Department, Harris County Sheriff's Department, and METRO at the [SafeClear] announcement press conference, and in the program's promotional materials.
- Visibly team law enforcement and [SafeClear] responders in the program's communication materials to reinforce collaborative relationship.

Appendix



Re-branded Vehicle Clearance Naming Strategies H-GAC Traffic Incident Management Support

SafeClear

The name, SafeClear, has been used since Houston Mayor Bill White initiated the vehicle clearance program in 2005. Reflecting both the objective of keeping motorists safe, and highways clear, the name SafeClear is easily understood and has established some valuable name recognition.

The disadvantage to keeping SafeClear as a name for the expanded quick clearance strategy is the negative public and policymaker opinions generated from reinstatement of towing charges, and motorist confusion with overlapping MAP jurisdictions. The best opportunity for capitalizing on SafeClear's name recognition, while distancing it from a negative image, is through a logo and campaign visual re-design.



Although research for SafeClear graphics has resulted in these two images, neither have strong public recognition or represent solid visual identification with the SafeClear program.

In fact, when reporting on the SafeClear program in the past, local media have generated their own graphic identity for the program, such as this example:



Perhaps the most recognized “branding” currently associated with SafeClear is the graphic text used on responder vests:



A comprehensive re-design of the SafeClear brand, with increased visibility for the program, as outlined in the Public Communications Plan, would be necessary for retaining the existing name.

Alternative Name

If the consensus of the committee is that a new name should be created and branded for the clearance program, we have provided alternative names and ideas for consideration.

Quick Clear While we like this concept, we discovered this to be name of herpes remedy. It is also noted that it the program name for Ohio’s incident management program “Ohio QuickClear”.

Quick to Clear (QuickToClear.com is an available URL)

Free & Clear Dependent on possibility program will not remain free.

Tow Care

Clear Care

Car Care

Tow Clear Flow

Clear Tow

Tow & Go

Travel Care

Road Clear

Highway Clear

Swift Clear

Total Clear

Jam Free

Traffic Free

Quick Tow and **Fast Tow** are already names of towing companies in our area (Fast Tow is actually name of Jeanine Rash’s company)

Potential Tagline

Keeping Houston (or Harris County) Moving – tagline could be custom as additional counties come on board

Keeping Traffic Moving

Keeping Motorists Moving

Keeping Motorists on the Move
Keeping Our Highways Moving
Keeping Harris County Moving
Keeping Harris County on the Move
Moving Motorists Forward
Saving Lives and Travel Time
Driving Harris County Forward

Recommendation

It is our recommendation that SafeClear remain the name of the TIM clearance program because of its widespread name recognition among the general public. We further recommend a complete redesign of the logo and brand, and addition of a tagline, supported by a comprehensive education and promotion campaign, as outlined in the Public Communications Plan provided.