



APTA STANDARDS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM  
**RECOMMENDED PRACTICE**

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# Creating an Alternate or Backup Operations Control Center

**Abstract:** This *Recommended Practice* discusses the creation of an alternate or backup operations control center

**Keywords:** continuity of operations plan (COOP), operations control center (OCC), risk assessment

**Summary:** The purpose of an alternate operations control center is to provide for continuity of transit operation if and when the primary OCC becomes disabled or unusable following a significant emergency event that limits, restricts or renders inoperable the use of the primary OCC. It enables a transit agency to provide essential transportation operating functions after a significant emergency event that limits, restricts or renders inoperable the use of the primary OCC. Alternate OCCs should be capable of being activated within a minimum amount of time, as determined by the transit agency.

**Scope and purpose:** This *Recommended Practice* provides the basic requirements for an alternate OCC and an outline for the transition to that alternate facility when required. It also includes guidelines for restitution of the primary OCC when and if that becomes possible. Plans should provide for immediate actions to take to mitigate the effects of the emergency condition. Plans can be independent of or integrated into the agency's COOP. This document is an operations-specific subset of APTA SS-SEM-RP-001-08, "Creating a Continuity of Operations Plan."

## Summary of Recommendations:

- Develop procedure to transition from primary to alternate OCC
- Identify a facility to house the alternate OCC
- Identify the communications systems needed to support critical functions
- Identify vital records, databases and documents to support and sustain alternate OCC
- Develop a notification procedure and contact list to implement the transition to alternate OCC
- Provide adequate training for employees responsible for transition

This Recommended Practice represents a common viewpoint of those parties concerned with its provisions, namely, transit operating/planning agencies, manufacturers, consultants, engineers and general interest groups. The application of any standards, practices or guidelines contained herein is voluntary. In some cases, federal and/or state regulations govern portions of a rail transit system's operations. In those cases, the government regulations take precedence over this standard. APTA recognizes that for certain applications, the standards or practices, as implemented by individual transit agencies, may be either more or less restrictive than those given in this document.

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The American Public Transportation Association greatly appreciates the contributions of The Security Standards Working Group – Security Emergency Management, which provided the primary effort in the drafting of this *Recommended Practice*.

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## 1. Alternate OCC functionality

The CEO or other pertinent executive manager of the transit agency should define the operating functionality to be included in the alternate operations control center (OCC). The alternate OCC can include full functionality or can operate with reduced or limited functionality. In determining the required functions, an agency should start by conducting a risk assessment to determine the basic functionality required to maintain an acceptable level of service through the alternate OCC.

A procedure should be developed to provide for the transition from the primary to the alternate OCC. The procedure should be a living document that is updated as functions are added and new requirements incorporated. The resources needed to perform the specified functions should be defined, documented and included in the plan for the alternate OCC. Functions to be included are those that will enable the agency to provide the level of transit service desired, while maintaining the safety and well being of the agency's employees and the general population.

## 2. Implementation of functions

For each identified function, the transit agency should describe the actions that need to be taken, the tasks that need to be performed and the resources or equipment required. This could take the form of specific procedures, checklists, task lists or a combination of all three. Including specific procedures for most functions to be performed will facilitate an orderly transition. Successful transition to an alternate OCC is dependent upon careful planning and the availability of pertinent resources. Sections 4 through 7 describe resources that should be given specific consideration and addressed. In addition to the resources required to implement chosen functions, consider the resources needed to sustain personnel in the fulfillment of their responsibilities under emergency conditions.

## 3. Alternate facilities/locations

The transit agency should identify a facility to house the alternate/backup OCC. It should provide sufficient space for needed equipment and for personnel to work in a healthy, safe and secure environment. Depending on the size and needs of the transit agency, the facility could be as small as a desk in another building that serves as a base of operations or as large as a duplicate and fully functional OCC. Whenever possible, the facility should be located in a location separate from the primary OCC. It should be located at sufficient distance from the primary facility so that a single emergency will not render both facilities inoperable. When determining the alternate OCC location, all potential hazards should be considered.

As a practical matter, an agency should explore using existing facilities under its control to serve as the host for the alternate OCC. This might entail some expenditure in equipping facilities for dual use (i.e., normal function as well as alternative emergency function). This generally is more viable than maintaining facilities that are used only in times of disaster response.

## 4. Interoperable communication system

The transit agency should identify the communication systems that will be needed to support each essential function and plan for these to be available when needed. Consideration should be given to the various links that need to be established. These links might include communications with internal departments, field personnel, outside agencies, law enforcement and the public. Additionally, in cases where an alternate OCC is established, the agency should address how interoperable communications will be made available at the alternative facility. History has shown that conventional communication systems may be interrupted and inoperable in an emergency. Additional backup systems — such as GETS (Government Emergency Telecommunications Service) or satellite phone systems, as an example — should be considered.

The transit agency should be aware of and remain cognizant of the vision, goals, objectives, guidance and resources provide within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the National Emergency Communications Plan (NECP).

## 5. Personnel resources/support

The transit agency should identify the staffing needs to establish and maintain the alternate OCC. It should include the need for standby personnel during times of heightened security alert. As essential functions are evaluated with regard to human capital, the following elements should be considered:

- Job functions that needed to be performed.
- Necessary personnel required to perform these functions.
- Preparatory training to be provided to employees who will be called upon to fulfill non routine tasks (see Section 6 for additional information).
- Notification of employees (see Section 10).
- Meeting location and communications including logistical requirements such as transportation, food and lodging (see Section 7).

## 6. Vital records, databases and systems

The transit agency should identify the vital records, databases and hard copy documents needed to support and sustain the alternate OCC. The agency should address how the necessary equipment, systems and records will be made available at the alternative location

## 7. Additional resource requirements

The transit agency should identify critical physical resources required, beyond those specifically covered previously, to sustain each critical function, and plan for these to be available when needed. Fuel, electrical power, parts, material, equipment and other similar items needed for the OCC should be considered. In addition, extraordinary provisions may be necessary to support critical employees, including transportation, food and lodging.

## 8. Security for the alternate OCC

The transit agency must provide for security of the alternate facility while it is in a standby mode, as well as when it has been activated. Each agency must determine the appropriate level of security required.

## 9. Delegation of authority and order of succession

The agency should address pre-delegated authority for making critical policy determinations at the alternate OCC to ensure adequate oversight, coordination and continued transit operations, realizing that under certain circumstance senior managers may be unavailable for periods of time.

Additionally, the agency should identify critical senior managers and critical technical experts needed to implement and sustain the operation of the alternate OCC. For each of these individuals, the transit agency should identify one or more alternatives who will be authorized to assume the post if the primary individual is unavailable, along with any rules governing the limitations and conditions of the authorization.

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## 13. Notification and contact lists

The agency should develop a notification procedure and maintain contact lists necessary to implement the transition to an alternate OCC. This list must include both outside agencies as well as inside departments and individuals. It might take the form of a cascading structure. The contact information for executive managers and individuals with primary responsibilities for implementing required functionality (along with appropriate alternatives) should be listed first, along with a notification procedure to ensure that a leadership structure is implemented early in the process. Department managers need to have pre-identified contact information and a contact process/procedure in place to acquire the necessary human resources.

## 14. Training and exercises

The transit agency should provide appropriate training for individuals who fulfill essential roles or assume key responsibilities within the alternate OCC. Training and testing should cover all mission-critical systems and procedures. It should include mobilization, transfer and setup procedures, as well as procedures for continuing operation. Additionally, exercises or drills including actual operation from the alternate OCC should be conducted periodically if possible to test the plan and to identify any problem areas. In practice, efficiencies might be gained by conducting these exercises in conjunction with (or annexed to) other emergency response exercises required from time to time.

## 15. Recovery/restoration

The agency should consider what procedures, if any, would be needed to resume normal operations. Consideration should be given to how the agency will inform employees that operations are being returned to the primary OCC and any other transition needs to provide for resumption of normal operation. It further should include the proper deactivation of the alternate OCC to ensure its capacity for reactivation when required.

## References

APTA *Recommended Practice* SS-SEM-RP-001-08, “Creating a Continuity of Operations Plan.”  
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## Abbreviations and acronyms

<b>CEO</b>	chief executive officer
<b>COOP</b>	Continuity of Operations Plan
<b>DHS</b>	Department of Homeland Security
<b>GETS</b>	Government Emergency Telecommunications Service
<b>NECP</b>	National Emergency Communications Plan
<b>OCC</b>	operations control center