Virtual Coordination Center

Seattle, WA

SCENARIO

Particularly during major roadway incidents, managing the Seattle metropolitan region's transportation system is a complex responsibility involving state and local transportation agencies, transit providers, law enforcement, and emergency responders. Despite efforts by on-scene responders to quickly and safely clear incidents and restore traffic flows, several major incidents occurred on key north-south routes, triggering Seattle area transportation agencies to re-examine their approach.

After-incident reports revealed that siloed information systems and legacy communication channels were limiting agencies' ability to fully leverage collective resources and provide an effective, coordinated response. Agencies often found themselves waiting for information before they could act, with little visibility into each other's decisions. As a result, agencies struggled to provide timely and actionable information to travelers.

Transportation system managers needed a way to communicate unified messages and make informed decisions about system operations.

SOLUTION

With facilitation help from the University of Washington, eight public agencies developed a multi-agency platform for joint incident response called the Virtual Coordination Center (VCC). The VCC is a cloud-based system that will enable agencies to share information and coordinate activities in real time. The Washington State Department of Transportation is currently administering the construction of the system. When completed in 2023, the VCC will offer faster awareness of and response to major incidents, more informed decisions, and more unified public messages—all toward the ultimate goal of clearing roadway incidents faster and reducing incident-related congestion.

RESULT

The VCC is expected to improve communication and coordination for all sizes and types of incidents, including the non-recurring events—like accidents, disabled vehicles, flooded roadways, and trucks losing their loads—which account for nearly half of the region's congestion.