

The Mississippi Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) has the statutory responsibility to coordinate the development and implementation of Mississippi's emergency management activities. During a State of Emergency, as declared by Governor Musgrove, MEMA is in charge of overall emergency activities. Transportation represents only one component of our state's emergency response activities.

I would like to give you some background regarding MDOT's proposed I-59 contra-flow plan. The proposed I-59 contra-flow plan was initiated by the Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT). We agreed from the beginning that the MDOT plan was a good transportation plan; however, it is not a comprehensive evacuation plan that addresses all areas of emergency management between Mississippi and Louisiana.

Governor's Musgrove, representatives of his office, my agency, the Department of Public Safety, the Department of Human Services and the National Guard met with MDOT staff on multiple occasions to discuss MDOT's draft plan. Agency personnel shared their concerns regarding state resources required, the impact on local communities and emergency management operations, as well as emergency response capabilities, with MDOT personnel during these meetings. Mississippi resources are limited. During times of hurricane evacuation, the National Guard is deployed to assist our Gulf Coast evacuees and the Highway Patrol is also asked to assist not only in the coastal area, but throughout our state as the evacuees move northward.

Recognizing the importance of local input, Governor Musgrove requested that local officials have the opportunity to review and comment on the proposed contra-flow plan. MEMA hosted seven public meetings in the I-59 corridor counties and on the Gulf Coast in April 2002. Approximately 250 local officials attended these meetings and expressed concerns ranging from the potential financial burden placed on local governments; the shortage of local law enforcement, fire services and emergency management resources; as well as shortage of adequate shelter space and personnel. MDOT personnel were present at all seven public meetings. In addition, my office has received letters from local officials, as well as resolutions passed by boards of supervisors, expressing their concerns about the proposed plan

MDOT's proposed plan initiates I-59 contra-flow at the request of the State of Louisiana. It is important to note that Louisiana did not request that Mississippi implement contra-flow during Isidore or Lili. Nor did Louisiana implement its own I-59 contra-flow plan to the Mississippi state line. Contrary to rumors, the northbound lanes of I-59 in Mississippi were open for traffic. Mississippi was prepared for the Louisiana evacuees with 19,000 shelter spaces available; however, we only had 350 at the peak of operations for Lili.

Governor Musgrove and Governor Foster have agreed to work together to develop a comprehensive evacuation plan and Governor Musgrove has designated me to represent the State of Mississippi in the development of this plan. I will work with my counterpart in Louisiana to develop a plan that addresses all of the components of evacuation, including evacuation routes, sheltering, emergency response and resource allocation. Such a plan must not adversely impact our state or the safe evacuation of our Mississippi Gulf Coast communities.

Mississippi is committed to working with Louisiana to provide for the safe and orderly evacuation of its citizens during a time of impending natural disaster. By working together as partners, we can develop a comprehensive evacuation plan that provides for the health and safety of the citizens of both of our states.