

CUMBERLAND-DAUPHIN-HARRISBURG TRANSIT AUTHORITY

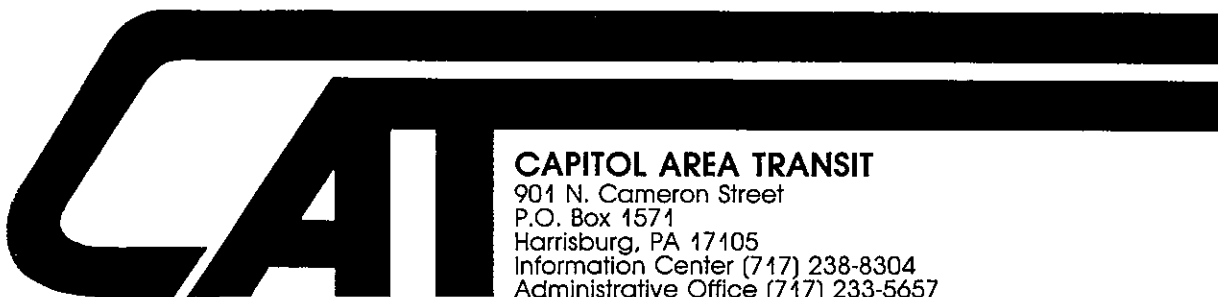
EMERGENCY RESPONSE

FLOOD OF JANUARY, 1996

PRESENTED BY

JAMES H. HOFFER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

TUESDAY, MARCH 19, 1996





CUMBERLAND-DAUPHIN-HARRISBURG TRANSIT AUTHORITY  
FEMA - PUBLIC DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE REQUEST - FLOOD  
MARCH 19, 1996

The Cumberland-Dauphin-Harrisburg Transit Authority (Capitol Area Transit or CAT) was formed under the Commonwealth's Municipal Authorities Act of 1945, as amended. Since July 1, 1973, Capitol Area Transit has provided all the mass transportation service to the City of Harrisburg and the surrounding urbanized area. CAT has a fleet of 65 revenue vehicles which carry passengers over 26 routes throughout Cumberland and Dauphin counties.

At approximately 11:00 AM on Saturday, January 20, 1996, an evacuation was ordered for the portion of Susquehanna Township, north of Vaughn Street along Front, Second and Green Streets. At approximately 12:00 noon, the Susquehanna River flowed onto Front Street. At the same time, Paxton Creek, located to the west of Cameron Street, overflowed its banks. The CAT maintenance, bus storage and office facility is located at 901 North Cameron Street in Harrisburg, several hundred feet from the Paxton Creek.

Early Saturday afternoon, Capitol Area Transit began to work closely with the City of Harrisburg, Dauphin County Emergency Management and the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency. CAT provided lift-equipped buses to assist in evacuating three high-rise residential buildings, the Susquehanna Center for Nursing and Rehabilitation, River

House Apartments and Linden Terrace. People were transported to evacuation centers or to the Seidle Memorial Hospital in Mechanicsburg. Many of the people were senior citizens and/or individuals with disabilities.

An evacuation shuttle route in uptown Harrisburg was also established. As people were ordered to leave their homes, they could board CAT buses to be transported to a shelter. On Sunday, January 21, buses were used to transport people from a shelter to the Susquehanna Center for Nursing and Rehabilitation.

Life, public health and safety was protected by Capitol Area Transit honoring the request to provide emergency transportation service utilizing fourteen (14) buses to transport people from their residences to a safe location.

While CAT drivers were transporting evacuees, other staff were making sure important equipment and supplies, tool boxes, computers and records were secured. All remaining buses and service equipment were driven off of the property to a secure location. This equipment was returned to the CAT facility on Sunday, January 21. Throughout this process, we were constantly planning for the eventual return to normal operations.

The CAT facility itself was very fortunate not to take on any water. However, we were virtually surrounded by water. One block to the north, at the intersection of Cameron

& Herr Streets, the swollen water of the Paxton Creek closed the intersection. Two blocks to the South, at Cameron & Walnut Streets, an automobile was inundated by four feet of water.

On March 5, 1996, Capitol Area Transit submitted a request for Disaster Relief Assistance totaling \$5,415 to the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency for life and safety services provided for the public well-being on Saturday, January 20, and Sunday, January 21, 1996. The request for reimbursement included wage and fringe benefit costs for hours of overtime worked by CAT employees and for the cost of mileage incurred on the fourteen buses used to provide evacuation service to the public.

A FEMA inspector made a site visit to CAT on March 8, to review the Flood Assistance Application and to ask questions. A Damage Survey Report recommending payment of CAT's request has been received. Finality of the process will not occur until payment is received. However, to date, I believe FEMA has been expedient and thorough in processing our claim.

While I can report a positive response to date from PEMA / FEMA regarding the flood response, I voice concern about their response to the blizzard which caused extraordinary expense. Snow plows on the two CAT pick-up trucks were no match for the drifted, accumulated snow at the Market Square Transfer Center and at the CAT garage

facility. Outside contractors had to be hired to plow and remove the snow from the Transfer Center and to plow the bus lanes and parking lot at the CAT facility. Without incurring this expense for contracted snow removal, the public transportation system could not have been made operational.

I believe the eligibility criteria which has eliminated mass transit from receiving financial assistance from extraordinary costs incurred must be reviewed. Capitol Area Transit is responsible for snow removal at its Transfer Center, not the City of Harrisburg. If the responsibility were with a City or Municipality, the same cost incurred would be subject to reimbursement. This is clearly an inequity. Extraordinary costs incurred by mass transit systems for emergency snow removal as a result of the blizzard should be considered as reimbursable costs.

In closing, I must share that this experience of disaster response was a reminder that mass transit not only provides over 1,300,000 transportation trips for Pennsylvanians daily, but also plays a vital role of protecting life, public health and safety in emergency situations as well.