

NOCoE Best Practices: Planned Special Event Management

Report #2

Planned Special Event Management

CONCEPT

A planned special event (PSE) is an incident known prior to occurrence, which can cause congestion and unexpected delays for travelers. The impacts are often different than recurring congestion in both the frequency and impact from the events and possibly reduction in available roadway.

In addition to event traffic, PSEs can affect a significant number of other roadway users, such as “travelers on adjoining roadways, regional or multistate teams, public transit, law enforcement, medical or fire responders, event parking, event organizers and the general public.” (Transportation Operations Manual, AASHTO, 2023)

As the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) states on their website:

Organizations that advance their capability maturity for PSEs benefit in the following ways:

REDUCED TRAFFIC CONGESTION

Effective planning helps minimize traffic jams, ensuring a smoother flow of vehicles.

IMPROVED MOBILITY

It enhances the overall movement of people and goods, making it easier for attendees to reach the event.

ENHANCED SAFETY

Proper management reduces the risk of accidents and ensures the safety of all travelers.

PARTNERSHIPS & TRUST

It enhances the overall movement of people and goods, making it easier for attendees to reach the event.

INTERAGENCY COORDINATION

Promotes better coordination between different agencies, leading to more efficient use of resources.

ECONOMIC & TOURISM BENEFITS

Well-managed events may boost local economies and attract tourists.

Source: <https://ops.fhwa.dot.gov/pse/index.htm>

Planned Special Event Management

The following activities will attempt to address best practices for planned special events around the PSE planning cycle:



INITIAL PLANNING ACTIVITIES

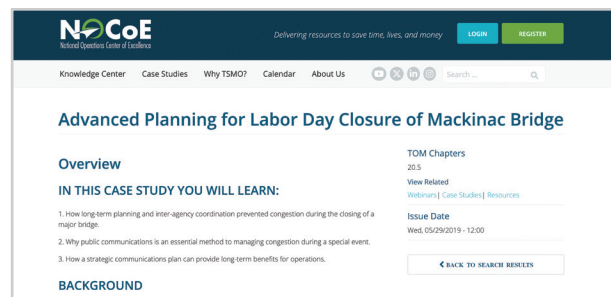
Initial planning activities include the identification of scenarios based on the specific event that could require changes to the overall traffic management plan and/or contingency planning. Activities in this phase may include:

1. **Information and data collection**, including past occurrences of similar events.
2. **Assessment of event-oriented risks**, such as political demonstrations, fanbases, or crowd response needs.
3. **Assessment of external factors** affecting the scope of an event, may include road construction activities, security requirements, or the physical state of the venue.
4. **Contingency planning** for weather, security, major traffic incident(s), event cancellation, etc.
5. **Event operations planning** to minimize travel delays, sustain transit operations, traveler information, emergency vehicle access, etc.
6. **Selection of measures of effectiveness** to assess both quality of activity as well as quantity. This may include measures that match the special event spectators and items most seen by the traveling public.



Natalie Bettger from the North Central Texas Council of Governments provides an excellent overview of their initial planning activities for the 2026 World Cup in this video.

[WATCH NOW](#)



Michigan DOT outlined their successful public communications plans for the annual Labor Day Mackinac Bridge Walk:

[READ NOW](#)

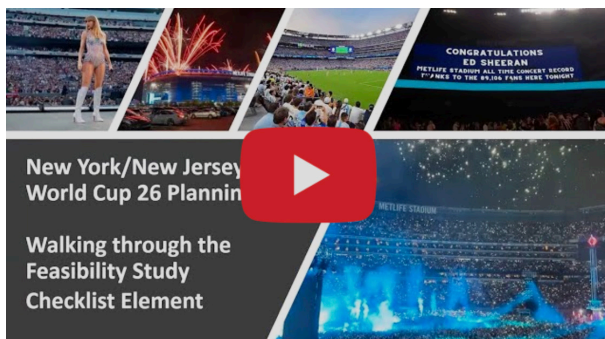
Planned Special Event Management

FEASIBILITY STUDY

The feasibility study is an opportunity to assess how the planned special event will cause traffic problems, where they may occur, and the impacts of the identified problems.

Activities may include:

- Travel forecasting
- Market area analysis
- Parking demand analysis
- Traffic demand analysis
- Roadway capacity analysis



Sal Cowan and Liz Falcone of New Jersey DOT provide an excellent overview of their work on feasibility studies for the 2025 FIFA Club World Cup and the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT PLAN

A traffic management plan for a PSE addresses issues associated with traffic, parking, signal timing, public transit, ADA accessibility, and more to mitigate problems on the day of the event.

Activities include:

- Traffic flow routing
- Site access and parking planning
- Pedestrian access planning
- Traffic control planning
- Travel demand management and transit service planning
- Other advance planning objectives, including traffic incidence management

District DOT exemplified the value of a traffic management plan that works in relation to contingency planning during the 2025 Presidential Inauguration. When the plans for the inauguration changed several days before the event, the extensive traffic planning allowed the agency to quickly reroute and divert VIPs based on a thorough understanding of their traffic management plan.

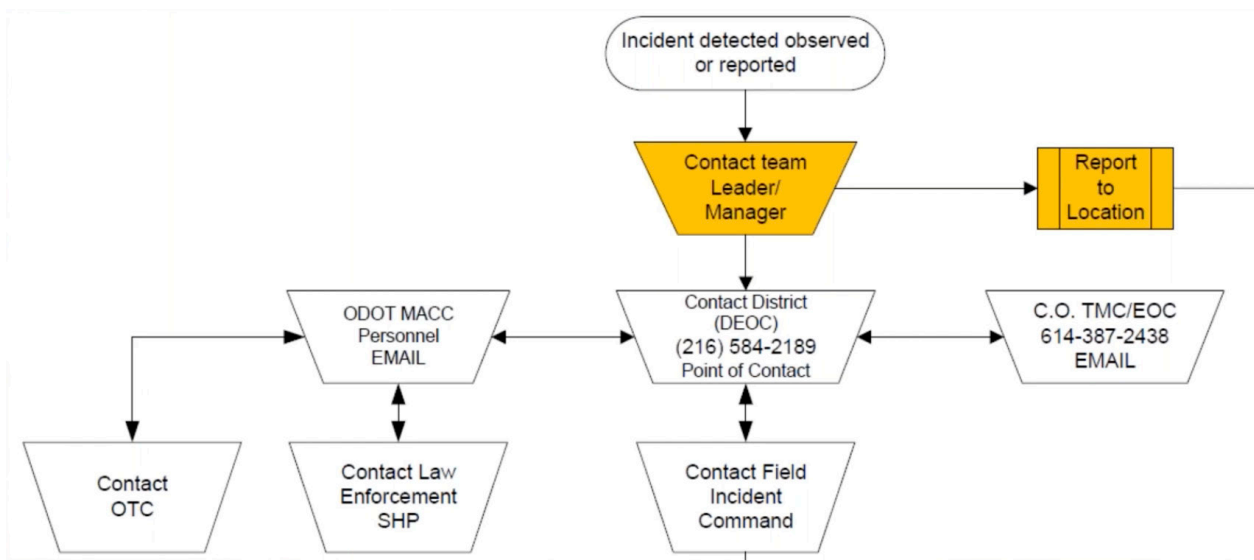


Planned Special Event Management

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES

Implementation activities focus on deployments and the conducting of testing and training activities. The five activities to execute deployment are:

1. Develop an implementation plan
2. Conduct a stakeholder simulation exercise
3. Establish interagency communications service and capability
4. Test equipment resource
5. Recruit and train volunteers



Ohio DOT shared their detailed interagency communication plan during a debrief on their planning efforts for the 2016 Republican National Convention.

[READ THE DEBRIEF](#)

Planned Special Event Management

DAY-OF-EVENT ACTIVITIES

Day-of-event activities include both the execution of previous plans as well as real-time conditions monitoring before, during, and after the event. Real time traffic management becomes essential as does using previously identified measures to understand expectation vs reality.

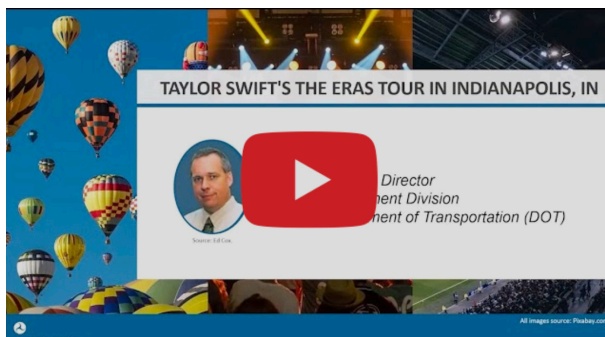
Georgia DOT wrote a case study outlining their day-of capabilities, including how their “Playbook” was able to communicate all variables and scenarios for all partner agencies.

[READ THE CASE STUDY](#)

POST-EVENT ACTIVITIES

Post event activities include compiling and reviewing measures of effectiveness, participant evaluation and post-event debriefing and reporting.

The debrief process is effective when it works to enable organizational readiness for the next event. Examples include debriefs done after the 2017 total eclipse with an eye for the 2024 total solar eclipse or in Super Bowl after action reviews.



Ed Cox of Indiana DOT talks about the larger debriefing aspects after the Taylor Swift Eras Tour weekend in Indianapolis.

Resources

- [PSE Checklist for Practitioners](#)
- [2024 Total Solar Eclipse Information for Transportation Agencies](#)
- [Planned Special Events Capability Maturity Model: A Concise User's Guide to the Online Self-Assessment Tool](#)
- [NOCoE PSE Portal](#)
 - [PSE Spotlight Webinars](#)
 - [2026 World Cup Resources](#)
 - [WC26 Toolkit](#)
 - [WC26 NJ/NY Exchange \(Oct '24\)](#)
 - [WC26 CTE Workshop \(June '24\)](#)
 - [WC26 Overview \(Feb '24\)](#)
 - [Solar Eclipse Resources](#)
 - [2024 Solar Eclipse](#)
 - [2017 Solar Eclipse](#)
 - [Solar Eclipse Peer Exchange](#)
 - [Other PSE Resources](#)
 - [Labor Day Mackinac Bridge Walk](#)
 - [Super Bowl LIII \(Atlanta 2017\)](#)
 - [Super Bowl XLVIII \(New Jersey, 2014\)](#)
 - [2016 Republican National Convention](#)
 - [FHWA PSE Resources](#)