

5. Conclusion

Contraflow operations should be one of many hurricane response actions at the disposal of the FDOT, though the Districts agree that the practice is one they hope they never use. There are risks inherent in the implementation of contraflow operations, and limitations on both available hours for operation and viable termini. The resources and personnel that would be devoted to a contraflow operation may actually be better utilized in some other response action, or even in support of the “shelter in place” strategy being advocated by state emergency management.

Contraflow plans referenced in this document are just that – plans. None have ever been used under actual conditions or otherwise initiated in connection with a hurricane evacuation. Though each has been carefully crafted and contingencies accounted for, the true test will come in the implementation. To their credit, Florida’s transportation professionals and emergency responders have mapped their contraflow plans with considerable thought and critical analysis. They realize that the precontraflow assessment of conditions is as crucial as the execution of the contraflow plan itself. Indeed, the decision *not* to institute a contraflow operation is a valid outcome of such assessment, depending on the hurricane’s force, speed, direction, anticipated landfall, the population threatened, and the type of evacuation necessary to move that number of people out of harm’s way.

Coordination essential for contraflow operations to work effectively occurs well before the plan is activated. Besides District personnel from the Maintenance, Traffic Operations, and Safety offices, there must be involvement of local government representatives, police, fire, emergency medical services, and other Traffic Incident Management (TIM) team members so that the scope of contraflow action is understood and its operational phases carried out properly. When the time comes to implement a contraflow operation, this supporting framework of agencies and expertise will increase the likelihood of success.

With the big picture in mind, the final focus must be on the details. As past efforts elsewhere have illustrated, large-scale evacuations using contraflow procedures depend on setup; proper timing of operations; choosing the right starting and termination points; and the availability of emergency responders who have access to disabled vehicles and other incidents. Sufficient numbers of vehicles, staff, and equipment are essential. Consistent, predictable, logical plans must be readily available. The contraflow traffic function must be supported with motorist information supplied using VMS units, 511 advanced traveler information services, HAR broadcasts, and other means.

Contraflow is a play in Florida’s hurricane response playbook. If the time comes to call the play, and the team is practiced and prepared, the result will be a safe, effective evacuation of the people a hurricane threatens.