NATIONAL SECURITY

FHWA ensures that the nation's highway system is ready for any mobilization needs of the U. S. Armed forces. Highways are critical links between U. S. bases and railheads, seaports and airports. FHWA also assists in planning and creating a state of readiness in anticipation of any natural disaster.

For example, the destruction wrought by such hurricanes as Hugo in 1992 and Floyd in 1999 prompted FHWA and other state and local groups to organize a workshop to share experience and "best practices" in affected areas. Hurricane Floyd, in particular, pointed up the shortcomings and lack of planning necessary when Charleston, SC, was ordered to evacuate. Because of the suddenness of this emergency, the huge amount of traffic nearly overwhelmed the interstate system.

The tiny town of Princeville, NC, was particularly hard hit by Hurricane Floyd. Founded after the Civil War by a group of freed slaves, the town was chartered in 1885, making it one of the oldest towns in the country founded by African-Americans. On September 15-16, 1999 the Tar River crested at 43 feet and the entire town was covered by 10-15 feet of water. Although none of the roadway in the town was damaged, FHWA assisted the North Carolina Department of Transportation in cleaning debris from the streets. In addition, FHWA is actively participating in plans to help rebuild the town, which include widening the U. S. 64 (business) bridge linking Princeville to Tarboro.

In spite of the nearly complete destruction of Princeville's residential housing and the availability of buyout funds from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the residents of Princeville elected to stay and rebuild their historic town. Accepting the FEMA buyout would have meant relocating elsewhere.

Photo by Charles E. Jones, North Carolina Department of Transportation

This half-submerged satellite dish, still aimed at its target but unable to function for the moment, might have symbolized the spirit of Princeville's residents: down but by no means out.

The interest in hurricane preparedness was evident as shown by attendance at the workshops. What had started out as a modestly attended meeting grew to include multiple representatives from virtually every state on the southern and eastern coasts as well as many inland states that suffered damage from these storms.

The Hurricane Highway Recovery Workshop proceedings documented the many discussions held at the meeting.

But natural disasters are not confined to the eastern half of the country. Torrential rains over periods of time can cause rivers to overflow and create extensive damage to an area's road system. For example, in 1993, 8 million acres in nine Midwest states were flooded from rivers that overflowed their banks. FHWA is frequently asked to provide technical and financial aid to areas throughout the country that suffer damage from flooding through its Emergency Relief program.

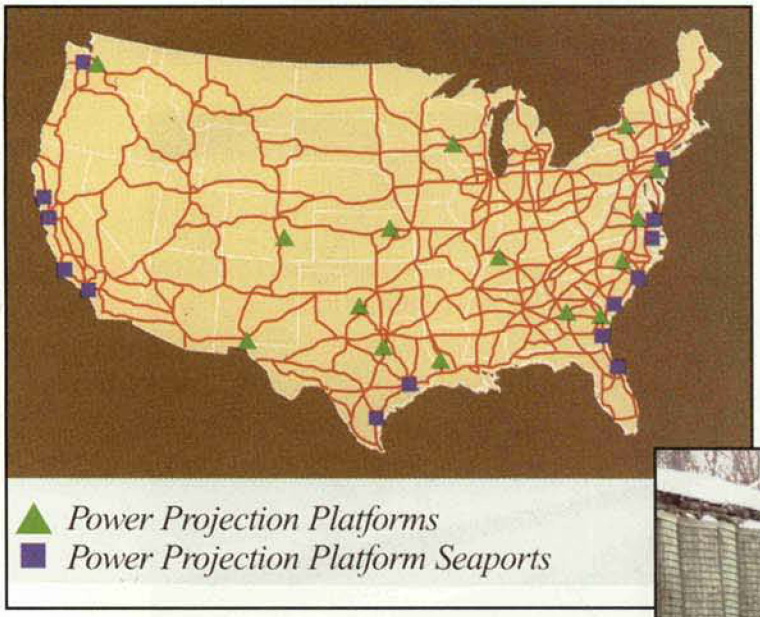
The Jefferson City, MO, area suffered heavy highway damage during the 1993 floods.

Earthquakes are another natural disaster that can be destructive to America's highway system. The San Francisco area suffered major highway damage during the 1989 earthquake that measured 7.1 on the Richter scale and caused 62 deaths.

FHWA gave both technical and financial aid to California after the 1989 earthquake.

The Los Angeles area also experienced an earthquake in 1993 that sliced I-5 in half along with major damage to other area highways and bridges. A team of seismological experts from FHWA and CALTRANS was on the scene in a matter of hours.

Like hurricanes, earthquakes are not confined to one part of the country. The likelihood of a major earthquake in the New Madrid fault area in Illinois and Missouri grows daily. The last major quake in the winter of 1811-1812 was disastrous, even with the sparse population that was affected by the earthquakes and aftershocks. In September 2000, FHWA, the Missouri Department of Transportation and other sponsors hosted the first annual Post Earthquake Highway Response and Recovery Seminar in St. Louis. Unlike a hurricane, an earthquake leaves people with no place to escape. Thus, the need exists for advanced planning and preparation. The seminar attracted earthquake scientists and transportation specialists from all over the world as well as other earthquake-prone areas of the United States.



The STRAHNET Network speeds movement of military equipment and supplies

FHWA is also actively improving the nation's national defense mobility through a partnership with the Department of Defense. The program identifies crucial highways and connectors that together create the Strategic Highway Corridor (STRAHNET). The network is composed of 15,000 miles on the National Highway System (NHS) and another 2,000 miles of roadway that connect bases to NHS roads.

Photo courtesy of U.S. Army

Recent military conflicts outside the country underscored the need to be able to move troops and equipment like this HUMVEE vehicle rapidly over the nations highways to offshore departure points.

Lastly, FHWA, in conjunction with Office of the Secretary of Transportation, is undertaking a study to identify critical highway structures that might be vulnerable to terrorist attacks or acts of sabotage. The program can include training of operators of such facilities to recognize suspicious acts or persons.

FHWA is proud to have a role in ensuring the national security of the country by making certain that the highway system is ready to accommodate the needs of the United States armed forces. It also stands ready to assist in the event a natural or man-made disaster affects the use of our highways.