

## **RARET Flooding 2025 Transportation Report**

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Anecdotes from Community Transit, DART (Hopelink Direct Ops), PCCTC/Beyond the Borders, Snoqualmie Valley Transportation (SVT), Hopelink NEMT, Paratransit Services (NEMT), Snow Goose Transit, and Snotrac

### **Report Summary**

[RARET](#), a [Mobility Management](#) coalition serving Snohomish, King, and Pierce Counties, engaged transportation providers and mobility managers following the late-2025 major flooding in western Washington to identify lessons learned and best practices related to life-sustaining transportation during emergency events. Key findings include:

- Strengthening transportation provider flood preparedness and partnerships
  - Establishing internal task forces within smaller transportation providers to support flood response
  - Improving coordination between [Non-Emergency Medical Transportation](#) (NEMT) brokers and county-level emergency management
- Increasing access to transportation resources during recovery
  - Leveraging Mobility Management education and outreach capabilities
  - Ensuring printed transportation materials are available in multiple languages and that digital resources are accessible

Transportation providers, particularly those with smaller staff and more limited resources, may be less prepared for flood impacts. Providers with established flood response processes, often informed by prior experience, offer valuable models for best practices. The flooding event also highlighted the critical role NEMT can play during emergencies. Strengthening bi-directional relationships between NEMT brokers and emergency management agencies is mutually beneficial. Additionally, greater integration of Mobility Management into preparedness and recovery efforts can help ensure transportation needs are addressed through direct support from mobility professionals where possible.

For RARET, key internal lessons learned include:

- The need to improve education for emergency managers on the use and implementation of the Emergency Transportation Provider Network (ETPN) Portal, particularly for situations when RARET staff cannot be reached
- Increasing RARET's understanding of statewide mobility managers' capabilities and readiness to support emergency response efforts

- Coordinating with the regional one-call, one-click project to clarify procedures for accommodating individuals who wish to use text messaging, while that functionality remains under development

## **Recommendation Cheat Sheet**

### **Preparation**

- Transportation providers should identify flood-prone areas within their service regions and develop flood action plans where risks exist.
- Emergency management agencies should strengthen relationships with Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) brokers to improve regional resilience.
- Transportation providers should maintain current, printable transportation resources that can be distributed as physical materials during disasters, in multiple languages.

### **Response**

- Transportation providers should understand which tools are available to assess flood risk, how to access them, and how to use them effectively. Response plans should clearly define risk thresholds that trigger specific actions.
- Transportation providers should identify key personnel responsible for monitoring developing flood conditions and supporting timely, informed operational decision-making.

### **Recovery**

- Mobility Management can serve as transportation subject matter experts when establishing recovery resource hubs.
- Clearly identifying priority languages in impacted zones for transportation materials enables mobility managers and transportation providers to collaborate on producing and distributing accessible resources.
- Following an event, the one-call, one-click tool [Find a Ride](#) can be useful to non-drivers displaced from their homes by helping them understand transportation options available to them in their temporary or permanent housing locations.

## Full Report

### Flooding Event Synopsis & General Transportation Impacts

December 2025 saw atmospheric river conditions [bringing trillions of gallons of rainwater](#) to the Pacific Northwest, triggering a hydrologic outlook in western Washington. This evolved into flood warnings for much of the region as the NWS River Gauge tool predicted major flood threats [as some reached historic levels](#). Natural events like these present distinct transportation challenges. For a geography like western Washington, [variable elevation and an abundance of rivers running from the mountains to the Puget Sound](#) mean that several communities and transportation corridors exist in flood plains. Infrastructure failure [from levee breaches](#) can further exacerbate flooding and expand the geographic extent of impacts.

From a transportation perspective, the primary impacts stem [from unusable infrastructure during major flood conditions](#), resulting in the [geographic isolation](#) of certain communities that effectively become population islands, as seen in past events such as 2009. As a result, the movement of people and essential goods is disrupted, requiring significant rerouting or suspension of travel until floodwaters recede. Individuals affected by flooding may experience prolonged delays or become completely cut off, forcing the postponement of even essential trips. In some cases, flooding directly impacts residences, displacing individuals from their homes and damaging or destroying personal property, including vehicles.

Individuals affected in this way may become non-drivers or be required to navigate unfamiliar transportation systems as they relocate. This presents unique challenges for individuals with disabilities or other mobility-related needs, for whom access to accessible transportation is essential to maintaining independence. The geographic boundaries of accessible transportation service areas can further limit options following relocation. For example, moving to a relative's home [more than 0.75 miles from nearest bus stop](#) may make an individual ineligible for ADA paratransit services. Insufficient transportation access can disrupt medical appointments, food access, and medication refills; limit participation in work, school, and religious services; and, when prolonged, contribute to social isolation.

### Report Details

This report examines observations and experiences shared by transportation providers and mobility managers in King, Pierce, and Snohomish Counties to identify key takeaways for strengthening regional transportation resilience during future flooding events. The analysis is limited to RARET's service area, which includes these three counties; significant impacts in Skagit and Whatcom Counties, for example, are outside the scope of this report.

## Transportation Provider Anecdotes

A collection of flood event anecdotes from transportation professionals from transit agencies, transportation providers, and NEMT brokers in the Central Puget Sound region of Washington State.

### **Community Transit**

Beginning with the region's largest transportation providers, regional transit agencies that connected with RARET reported impacts that were largely limited to service reroutes. For example, Ryan Zavala of [Community Transit](#) noted that they had a “few reroutes to worry about internally,” and that they “were on standby for evacuation assistance but were never called.” One notable outcome was the successful use of zero-fare policies during the event. Community Transit’s “fare-free policy for an emergency event was activated in response to the County's request for fare free services,” and the agency “ensured that all requests for assistance outside of regularly scheduled stops and reroutes were taken care of.” While extreme cold and heat are more common triggers for these policies, their use during a flooding emergency highlights their flexibility and value as a response tool.

### **Metro DART (Hopelink Direct Operations)**

Flood impacts were more pronounced in rural and suburban areas, where service is often provided by contracted operators on behalf of larger transit agencies. One such provider is Hopelink's [Direct Operations division, which operates DART service](#) for King County Metro.

Dan Walker, General Manager of Direct Operations, noted that because services operate close to where many employees live, flooding in South King County immediately affected staffing. Several team members “were regularly late to work due to the road closures and at least one driver [was] stranded at home.” As conditions rapidly changed, this resulted in “a bit of chaos as roads were closing frequently throughout,” with staff “trying to not only find a new route for drivers but to also notify King County Metro.”

Two major challenges stood out. First was the evacuation order related to the Tukwila levee breach, where there was a “lack of information we had trying to ensure vehicle got out of the area (Route 906).” Second were rapidly changing conditions in the Duvall area, where bridge closures stranded staff and isolated the town while a DART bus was present. In response, Direct Operations had to adapt quickly, including arranging accommodation for staff members stranded by the closures. Based on this experience, Direct Operations identified a need for more robust flood planning among transportation providers, similar to the detailed preparations commonly made for snow events. Improved monitoring, particularly in the Snoqualmie Valley, was also identified as a critical need going forward.

### **Snoqualmie Valley Transportation**

Some rural transportation providers operate independently, with limited support from larger regional agencies. [Snoqualmie Valley Transportation \(SVT\)](#) is one such provider, serving a rural, river-dense service area that experienced severe flooding impacts. Ed Holmes, Operations Manager at SVT, described how he regularly convened an in-person task force with the SVT Dispatch Manager and Director to discuss conditions and make “collective decisions and [coordinate] resources.” These discussions included whether to “limit or close routes” based on current flood conditions. Decision-making relied on “data from online mapping and weather sites, as well as data we collected ourselves as we drove around our service area.” Once decisions were made, SVT ensured timely communication: “Once we made the decision to limit or close routes, we made sure to message that information to our staff, our riders, and metro across multiple platforms.” Flood levels ultimately forced SVT to suspend operations as communities such as Duvall and Carnation were cut off by historic flooding. However, SVT was able to minimize downtime through this coordinated approach.

Ed credited his experience in local government with reinforcing the value of having “representatives from all the affected departments in the same room” to support effective decision-making. Amy Biggs also emphasized that flooding in the region “happens so frequently that it generally follows a pattern,” highlighting the importance of local knowledge and experience.

## **Hopelink NEMT**

While fixed-route services faced significant challenges, the flooding event also highlighted the critical role of door-to-door transportation providers and brokerages, particularly [Hopelink’s Non-Emergency Medical Transportation \(NEMT\)](#) program. NEMT facilitates door-to-door transportation for Medicaid-eligible clients traveling to and from medical appointments. In Washington, [NEMT operates through a brokerage model](#) in which organizations like Hopelink coordinate rides with contracted, private service providers across an entire county. During flooding in South King County, Darryl Sierra, Director of Hopelink NEMT, reported that the program was asked to assist with “was the evacuation of three kidney centers,” amid “significant uncertainty and rapidly changing conditions.” NEMT first “worked closely with the kidney centers to collect all necessary client information,” then “convened a huddle with the Scheduling and Partner Relations teams to develop a coordinated action plan.”

To manage limited resources, “Clients were prioritized based on vulnerability and urgency,” with the goal of “ensuring those with the most immediate needs were assisted first, while others who could safely wait were scheduled accordingly.” Despite major road closures, including Highway 167, “all Hopelink clients were successfully evacuated from the three kidney centers before 7:00 p.m.” Darryl credited the outcome to “strong teamwork, effective communication, and the dedication of staff and service providers.” Looking ahead, he noted “opportunities to better support NEMT operations during large-scale emergencies,” including “additional resources for call center agents and [transportation] service providers,” which would “significantly improve our ability to respond.”

He also emphasized the human impact on staff and partners, noting that "While NEMT prioritizes client safety above all else, it is important to recognize that the agents taking calls and the transportation partners picking up clients were also personally impacted by the flooding." Many were "managing concerns related to their own families, homes, and businesses while continuing to serve clients." Darryl underscored that "increased resources and/or funding to support essential workers during emergencies would provide a critical safety net," helping ensure service continuity while acknowledging workforce impacts.

## Paratransit Services (NEMT)

Ann Kennedy of Paratransit Services, who are brokers of NEMT services in Clallam County, Jefferson County, Kitsap County, Mason County, Grays Harbor County, Thurston County, Pierce County, Pacific County, and Lewis County explained that they "didn't have any issues." She notes that they "were not called upon to do any evacuations," with the only disruptions were in getting "two people out of Morton in Lewis County, as all roads were under water for a few days." Accordingly, Paratransit Services "worked with the clients and their medical providers to ensure they were safe during the time we were not able to get to them."

## Snow Goose Transit

Melissa Johnson, the Operations Manager of [Snow Goose Transit](#), which operates in northwest Snohomish County, noted that their service area around Stanwood "did not have any direct flooding," noting only "a couple of side roads" were impacted. However, with news of regional flood impacts and wariness of potential flash-flooding, Snow Goose Transit did "end up having to restrict service or close service for three days." With all of the information about flood risks and being a service transporting "a lot of elderly and disabled individuals," Melissa explained that this decision was made because Snow Goose "just didn't feel that it was worth the risk" of these clients to be caught in flash flooding while waiting for the service.

Melissa goes on to explain that Snow Goose, spared from the brunt of the flooding, had capacity to render assistance to external areas should they have been asked. She emphasized that "we could have helped more," if they knew where it was needed. She highlights the evacuations in Skagit County as one potential example, as they are based "very close to the Skagit County line," only about "16 minutes outside of Mount Vernon and in that area." Melissa emphasizes that during the flooding she "was looking for resources and ways to help, especially since we were closed down, we had vehicles available because we weren't in service." A takeaway being that, should the right communication channels be put into place for the future, Snow Goose has capability to render aid in some circumstances.

## King County Metro Community Van

RARET also highlights the value of volunteer driver programs during recovery, particularly King County Metro's [Community Van](#) program. The program trains volunteer drivers to operate pre-located passenger vans for trips with a two-rider minimum within a two-hour radius of the trip origin. This model proved well suited for

post-flood recovery efforts in the Snoqualmie Valley, including debris removal on a farm supplying local food banks. A Community Van volunteer driver described the work: “Our job was walking a few fields to pick up debris/trash before they start spring mowing. Others were dismantling damaged greenhouses and cleaning out fridge/freezers that are still working but needed to be sanitized!” She noted that “The van just made it easy to get my crew and our supplies out there and we like keeping the van in use to create more awareness and so it stays available for the community.”

## **Mobility Management Anecdotes**

### **Snotrac (Snohomish County Mobility Management)**

Effective transportation responses to emergencies create opportunities to connect individuals with transportation resources well after the immediate event has passed, as communities move into the recovery and discovery phases. This was demonstrated by Snohomish County Human Services, and specifically Tyler Verda, a RARET partner with the agency, during operations at the Sultan Disaster Assistance Center (DAC).

Recognizing the potential need for transportation support during recovery, Snohomish County collaborated with [Mobility Management](#) professionals at [Snotrac](#) to establish a transportation resources table at the DAC for individuals seeking flood relief assistance. The table was staffed by Suleiny Altamirano, Mobility Navigation Program Manager at Snotrac.

While staffing the table on Wednesday, Suleiny noted that “many people we spoke with were coming from the Three Rivers area and had lost nearly everything due to the flooding.” She emphasized that many of those individuals were “Latino families, which highlighted a strong need for transportation information in Spanish.” She also observed that during this recovery phase, “there was strong interest related to teenagers, especially learning how to travel independently to Seattle for school, as well as applying for reduced fare ORCA programs.” Suleiny underscored that Mobility Management tables at DACs help “center the human side of mobility,” explaining that Snotrac “were able to do that through one-on-one conversations, not only with community members but also with other organizations tabling at the event.”

### **PCCTC / Beyond the Borders (Pierce County Mobility Management)**

In Pierce County, Mobility Management is coordinated through the [Pierce County Coordinated Transportation Coalition](#) (PCCTC), and the [Beyond the Borders](#) service, both led by Pierce County Human Services employee Daeveene May.

In reflecting on the flooding event, Daeveene noted that Pierce County “identified the crisis early” highlighting the [emergency proclamation](#) for the county issued on December 8<sup>th</sup>, and this early action helped “prevent excessive transportation needs. And lots of individuals were moved out of harm’s way early.” He highlighted that “Human Services and other Pierce County Departments rallied to have boots on ground to help citizens get out of the flood locations.” As a result, he explained that “personal transportation was not an ask” for Pierce County but rather, “the biggest transportation ask was actually trying to move RV’s that were unable to move out of the flood areas. He emphasized that “the Human Service Housing team” was “instrumental” in serving the residents of “mobile home parks that had flooded.”

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## **Lessons Learned**

### **General Takeaways**

Drawing from these external partner anecdotes, RARET identified several lessons to inform future flood events and emergency response efforts:

- Strengthening transportation provider flood planning and partnerships
  - Implementing internal task forces within smaller transportation providers for flood events
  - Improving relationships between Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) providers and county-level emergency management
- Increasing access to transportation resources during recovery:
  - Leveraging Mobility Management education and outreach capabilities
  - Ensuring printed transportation materials are available in multiple languages and that digital communications are accessible

Addressing the first takeaway, there was a clear organizational advantage among providers such as Snoqualmie Valley Transportation (SVT), whose familiarity with flooding—driven by geography and past experience—combined with established response plans, supported effective decision-making. Understanding which tools provide the best situational awareness during flood events, and maintaining partnerships that enhance that awareness, helps providers prepare for rapidly evolving conditions.

Internally, identifying staff best positioned to form task forces and assess emergency conditions produced positive outcomes. While many providers have well-developed procedures for seasonal events such as winter weather, less frequent events like historic flooding exposed preparedness gaps. For smaller agencies, working with peer providers that have established flood response plans may help build capacity and improve regional resilience.

Strengthening partnerships with NEMT providers may also improve client outcomes during emergencies. While the term “non-emergency” refers to the type of medical care involved, NEMT has long played a critical role in supporting life-sustaining medical transportation during regional emergencies. In King County, NEMT is already integrated into the public health-led Critical Medical Appointment Transportation (CMAT) procedures.

County-level emergency management agencies may benefit from developing closer relationships with NEMT brokers, similar to existing partnerships with regional transit agencies. Initial steps could include providing personal preparedness training for NEMT call center staff and connecting NEMT scheduling and partner relations staff to situational awareness tools such as the NWS Slack Channel to support two-way information sharing.

In King and Snohomish Counties, Hopelink Mobility’s NEMT program works with more than 20 contracted private transportation companies, with a service area that effectively includes every public road in both counties. Improved situational awareness could benefit these providers, and their geographic reach could further enhance regional awareness if conditions observed during trips were communicated back through coordinated channels.

Regarding the second takeaway, Mobility Management represents an underutilized asset in county-led recovery efforts. Mobility managers bring transportation subject matter expertise, established relationships with providers, and capacity for direct education and outreach. Integrating this expertise into in-person recovery hubs, such as Disaster Assistance Centers, as demonstrated by Snotrac’s work in Sultan, could improve transportation outcomes for individuals impacted by disasters.

Counties within RARET’s service area can connect with the coalition to better understand who their local mobility manager is and how to engage them in emergency preparedness and recovery efforts.

## RARET Takeaways

RARET, a tri-county emergency-focused coalition within the Hopelink Mobility Management Team, was active during the flood event and identified several internal lessons learned.

One key takeaway was the need for 24/7 tools to support transportation problem-solving during emergencies. RARET received a call over the weekend from King County Office of Emergency Management requesting accessible transportation support. By the time RARET returned to the office on Monday and responded, the

issue had already been resolved. As RARET is staffed by a single hourly employee, emergency needs do not always align with staff availability.

As a result, emergency management agencies would benefit from a supplemental resource when RARET is unavailable. Increased education on RARET's Emergency Transportation Provider Network (ETPN) Portal could help address this gap. Through the portal, emergency managers could have round-the-clock access to transportation provider information that may support accessible transportation needs during emergency events. RARET also participated in multiple flood response and recovery meetings, including the state ESF-6 (Mass Care) meeting, Coalition for Inclusive Emergency Planning (CIEP) flood meetings, and Snohomish County Flood Relief meetings. In these forums, RARET contributed transportation best practices and subject matter expertise.

One notable gap identified was the absence of a RARET-equivalent coalition in counties such as Skagit and Whatcom. While RARET leveraged existing contacts with Mobility Management professionals in those counties, their emergency response capacity remains largely unknown. Leveraging new statewide Mobility Management networks led by CTANW and supported by WSDOT will be critical to understanding the level of support available across county boundaries. Emergencies do not respect jurisdictional lines, and improving cross-county awareness will strengthen regional response efforts.

RARET also received and shared feedback related to the region's in-progress one-call, one-click program, particularly emphasizing the importance of text-based access to the one-call function. From an accessibility standpoint, understanding current options for written digital communication is essential as the program moves toward full texting integration.

Finally, RARET supported recovery efforts by providing supplementary materials to mobility managers conducting direct outreach during flood relief. While not all Mobility Management organizations have capacity for in-person outreach, RARET can help ensure that assistance centers are equipped with the materials needed to effectively support clients.

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