

Maryland State Police (MSP) Traffic Incident Management (TIM) Unit



By Maryland Department of Transportation

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Benefits Statement

The Maryland Department of Transportation State Highway Administration (SHA) Coordinated Highways Action Response Team (CHART) Program and the Maryland State Police's (MSP) newly formed Traffic Incident Management (TIM) unit swiftly responds to accidents, efficiently clears traffic obstructions, and communicates effectively. This partnership has already saved lives by expediting incident response, saved time by reducing congestion, and saved money by optimizing resource allocation and federal funding utilization. The TIM Unit's nimble traffic control and communication have been particularly valuable during major incidents, demonstrating a forward-looking approach to traffic incident management.

In this case study you will learn:

1. How MSP and SHA established the MSP TIM Unit to enhance incident response and traffic management.
2. How the partnership involves coordination, funding support, and an updated MOU to improve incident response efficiency.
3. How the TIM Unit demonstrated improved traffic clearance and effective responses during major incidents, solidifying its importance in traffic incident management.

BACKGROUND

The longstanding and mutually beneficial partnership between the Maryland Department of Transportation State Highway Administration (SHA) Coordinated Highways Action Response Team (CHART) Program and the Maryland State Police (MSP) has served as a model for Traffic Incident Management (TIM) programs across the nation. To expand upon this partnership and as a result of an approved budget enhancement, MSP, beginning in early 2023, now has a dedicated MSP Motorcycle Unit to act as SHA's CHART TIM Unit, which works directly with the SHA CHART Field Patrol Units and communicates directly with SHA traffic management centers (TMCs) during the bulk of in-service hours and special events, helping to alleviate pressure on local MSP barracks. The unit consists of six motor unit troopers, which may range in rank up to a first sergeant and is managed by an MSP lieutenant. This unit also serves as the primary point-of-contact and response for SHA Departmental crashes in several of its Districts and as the first point-of-contact and coordination point for MSP resources during special events (funeral processions, football games, etc.). It is able to handle reports and investigation in most cases, giving SHA more direct access to information quickly.

The establishment of the TIM Unit was an outcome of research conducted on SHA's behalf to identify best practices and other successful initiatives from other programs to stimulate ideas for the future direction of the CHART program. This research looked at programs in other states (i.e., New Jersey's Incident Management Response Team (IMRT)/ Incident Management Unit (IMU) and New York State Police Traffic Incident Management Unit) and learned that those states have had success with the implementation of dedicated IMUs.

TSMO PLANNING, STRATEGIES AND DEPLOYMENT

The CHART Program's primary mission includes responding to incidents in a timely manner and removal of obstructions from the highway. Coordination and communication among participating agencies have been critical to ensure quick and effective incident response, and this relationship with MSP, which is governed by a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between both agencies, is central to CHART's purpose. To this end, MSP has assigned a liaison officer at the Maryland CHART Statewide Operations Center (SOC), who represents the MSP on many matters of mutual concern regarding transportation issues (e.g., responding to long-term lane closures and major incidents, coordination of traffic management for special events and seasonal traffic operations, and attending regular CHART staff meetings to discuss internal projects and logistics. In addition and as part of the MOU, SHA also provides funding to support the MSP Crash Team, which supports the CHART Program by reconstructing incident scenes, promoting quick clearance of incidents, and reducing lane closure times by utilizing the most current technology.

Nevertheless, though this partnership has been fruitful and has benefited travelers on Maryland roadways for decades, both agencies recognized that they cannot rest on their laurels and must constantly evolve in order to continue to improve and realize efficiencies in inter-agency relationships and responses to incidents, which fueled the aforementioned recent budget enhancement to establish and deploy the MSP TIM Unit.

In 2016, Maryland's TSMO Strategic Plan was developed and subsequently updated. The plan organizes its recommendations around four thematic goals:

1. Business Processes & Collaboration
2. Systems & Technology

- 3. Data, Analysis & Performance Management
- 4. Customer Experience & Engagement

Each goal is supported by objectives and strategies with an objective being something SHA wants to achieve and strategies being actions that will help SHA achieve its objectives. The creation of the MSP TIM Unit clearly aligns with most of these goals and contributes to SHA's TSMO focus areas in the Maryland's TSMO Master Plan (which followed the TSMO Strategic Plan), which include safety, mobility, and reliability.

COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING AND EXECUTION

While this partnership has been fruitful and has benefited travelers on Maryland roadways for decades, both agencies recognized that they must constantly evolve in order to continue to improve and realize efficiencies in inter-agency relationships and responses to incidents. Through an enhancement to its operations budget and aided by research conducted on OTMO's behalf to identify best practices and other successful initiatives from other programs to stimulate ideas for the future direction of the CHART program, both agencies coordinated to develop the MSP TIM Unit and amended the existing MOU to incorporate it. This coordination involved the identification of key personnel, necessary resources, schedules, and shifts to complement the existing SHA CHART Field Patrol Units, fill any potential gaps, and ensure that the TIM Unit could be exclusively dedicated to TIM on Maryland's highways. Additionally, SHA coordinated with the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) – Maryland Division to ensure that the program was funded via the appropriate Federal Funding Program and met all requirements under Title 23 of the Code of Federal Regulations.

OUTCOME, BENEFITS AND LEARNINGS

The Unit, currently in operation, is performing well so far, and has already demonstrated that its vehicles can maneuver more nimbly in traffic and clear lanes more efficiently. Also, the unit operates on a Traffic Operations Center (TOC) radio channel, which provides them access to communication from a larger number of partner agencies. It has also demonstrated its value through its operations during two major incidents:



1. On March 4, 2023, a tractor-trailer hauling gasoline veered off US 15 in Frederick, Maryland and exploded. The crash, which unfortunately proved fatal, set fire to a residence and multiple unattended passenger vehicles. Off-duty MSP TIM units quickly responded from their residences and served as a conduit between SHA and all other responding agencies. They were essential in helping SHA units relieve the trapped traffic and provided a police escort for a vacuum truck from the Maryland/Pennsylvania line to the crash scene, which helped expedite the recovery process. The TIM unit then

worked rapidly to re-open all lanes on south-bound US 15 as quickly as possible to relieve the traffic pressures imposed on the City of Frederick during this national news event.

2. A second major event occurred on March 22, 2023 on I-695 north of Security Boulevard in Baltimore County in which a passenger vehicle slammed into a work zone and killed six SHA contractors. The MSP TIM Unit responded rapidly in force along with multiple SHA Shop resources, assisting with traffic mitigation as well as with the rapid and accurate relaying of information to SHA executive leadership. Their assistance during this second national news event was invaluable.

Based on these experiences, the future of this partnership remains strong, and the implementation of the TIM Unit exhibits a forward-looking approach to traffic incident management.