Disasters share much in common. What is particularly striking is the need for common metrics to understand what determines successes and failures in the response of transportation systems to such catastrophic events. Allan De Blasio’s paper, “Effects of Catastrophic Events on Transportation System Management and Operation,” provides observations and a framework to begin this process.

Themes that DeBlasio identifies that cut across disasters of different origins include interdependencies, institutional issues (in particular what DeBlasio alludes to as “stove piping”), and redundancies.

DeBlasio’s work suggests some additional considerations in each of these areas:

**Interdependencies** of transportation on other infrastructure: As is well known, transportation is inherently dependent on information technology (IT) and is becoming more so. For example, some of the key transit systems in the country are already computer operated or are planning to bring such systems online. IT has benefits as DeBlasio notes, but the challenge is going to be overcoming the costs when failures occur. Significant failures have occurred, for example, in the form of outages of computers and communication systems from disruptions of fiber optic cable or computer malfunctions that have rolled over into major outages for airports and airlines. Electric power is a key part of the operation of any transit system and most roadway support systems, including gasoline pumps, and the critical nature of a number of these interdependencies became very obvious during the blackout in the U.S. on August 14, 2003. Water and transportation become intimately bound up with one another whenever major flooding occurs that disables transportation systems. Finally sectors within transportation are interdependent and interact with one another often in negative ways, such as bridge collapses that result from marine vessels colliding with bridge supports.

**Institutional issues** are brought home when life-saving responses are needed. DeBlasio notes, for example, describes the evacuations that have been required in major disasters. What is noteworthy and is important for future disaster research is how variable the time has been to evacuate people across different disasters, and why some evacuations occur very rapidly while others can take more than a day. These experiences provide lessons learned, especially for transportation systems which play a vital role in accomplishing evacuation procedures.

**Redundancy** is popularly drawn upon as a means to introduce flexibility, especially in transportation systems, during times of extreme stress. The WTC attacks were a case in point when ferries played an important part in providing an alternative means of transport immediately