The Evacuees:

Frail elderly people, with varying degrees of mobility and cognitive function. Some non ambulant, others requires significant assistance and or supervision. The majority have medication needs. Evacuation is a high risk exercise in itself, and would require extreme care, co-ordination and a lengthy time frame. Evacuation would be more successfully managed where significant advance warning provided.

Transport options

Options tested include commercial volvo coach, metropolitan (public) transport bus, mid sized wheelchair access bus, access cab and SUV.

Initial observations are that a large bus requires alot of space, is not easily manœuvrevable and traffic flow would need to be closely coordinated to avoid grid lock.

Commercial Volvo Coach

The commercial coach had 6 steep steps that curve around. Very difficult to negotiate, impossible for wheelchairs and stretcher and highly challenging for any frail elderly person. The main aisle is very narrow and the seats are very close to each other which would not only be challenging for residents but for staff in terms of transfer of residents and attending to residents (significant manual handling risks). Impractical and high risk.

Public transport bus with disabled access ramps.

The bus had wide opening doors and would accommodate 2 to 4 wheelchairs. Steps up to the rear part of the bus are challenging. Despite the normal seating capacity of the bus (43), the number that would able to be safely transported would be significantly less (20-25 max). Disabled access includes flip down ramp and hydraulic lowering of the bus. Difficult to negotiate wheelchair onto bus. Significant manual handling risks. The manufactured purpose built ramp arranged by Resthaven which is 3.5 metres in length, was not available at the time for trial. It is anticipated that this type of ramp may make this exercise easier with a reduced entry gradient to negotiate when pushing the wheelchair onto the bus. No seat belts and necessity to manually secure residents.

Access Taxi

Well equipped vehicle with well trained driver. Able to accommodate up to 4 wheelchairs or 2 Princess Chairs or 10 people seated. Hydraulic ramp facilitates boarding. Versatility, overcomes manœuvrevability challenges posed by large bus. Boarding timeframes short.

This option was assessed as the most appropriate, efficient, effective and realistic for evacuation purposes.
RESTHAVEN BUSHFIRE EVACUATION PRACTICE AND LEARNING SESSION AT BELLEVUE HEIGHTS SITE ON 12TH AUGUST 2011: SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS IN RELATION TO TRANSPORT

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**Resthaven Wheelchair Access bus (mid range size)**

- Hydraulic lifter for wheelchair and person transfers
- Can have x2 persons (Not in wheelchair) on the lifter at one time
- Takes 2-3 minutes per lift and transfer
- Accommodates 2 wheelchairs and 13 passengers
- Seats have safety belts

Very suitable for evacuation purposes

**Resthaven Fleet SUV**

Passenger vehicle, limited numbers, possibly accommodate one stretcher, significant manual handling issues. Deemed not suitable.

**Other outcomes and observations noted at the session:**

- Any after hours evacuation will equate to minimal rostered staff unlike business hours where there are greater staff numbers and resources to support any evacuation process. This is a significant risk issue in terms of time, feasibilities and manual handling for those staff involved. Effectively during the day there can be 30-40 staff on a site as opposed to 3-4 staff during the evening and night hours.
- Preservation of no parking zones to ensure ease of access/egress
- Minimise number of buses/vehicles to reduce road congestion. (consider traffic Marshall)
- If evacuation vehicles making a number of trips, use safest closest receiving point to minimise turnaround time
- No guarantees from any transport option as to their availability due to the nature of the uncertainty of any such event
- An evacuation may occur during the night, need to consider staff working in the dark, is there sufficient lighting available to safely undergo an evacuation.
- Be under no illusion as to how many hours are required to undertake evacuation in the safest way possible.
- Transport co-ordination critical to avoid gridlock.
- Necessity for planned and orderly boarding. Wheelchairs/stretchers will block access and therefore should be among the last to board.
- Securing residents where transport option not equipped with seatbelts
- Hydration, psychological care, counselling
- Identification of and accounting for all residents