

How to Beat the Traffic After a Disaster

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 COLLAPSE SURVIVAL SITE

HOW TO BEAT THE TRAFFIC AFTER A DISASTER



In 2005, the threat of Hurricane Rita caused officials to call for an evacuation of Houston. An estimated 2.5 to 3.7 million people evacuated the city of Houston and the surrounding coastal areas, with many of them [trapped in gridlock for 24 hours or more](#). The combination of gridlock and a heat wave resulted in roughly 107 fatalities in the evacuation; and the hurricane never hit Houston.

Bugging out may be necessary in situations; but as Hurricane Rita proved, it is not without risk. Our roads and highways were never designed with the idea of a mass evacuation. They just can't handle the traffic load.

Not only that, but there aren't enough gas stations anywhere along those highways to ensure that cars won't be running out of gas. The state of Florida, which probably knows more about mass evacuation than any other state in the Union, includes trucking in massive amounts of gasoline anytime a hurricane evacuation is called for.

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Looking at that practically, an average tanker trailer holds 9,000 gallons of fuel. With an average tank size on cars today of 12 gallons, that means that each tanker can carry the fuel for 750 cars. With Florida's 2017 evacuation consisting of some 4 million vehicles, it would require over 5,000 tanker trucks to haul in enough fuel to fuel that evacuation.

What this means, is that there are three basic problems we must consider, when it comes to using our vehicles to bug out, whether in preparation for a disaster or after the disaster strikes. We have to remember that most of us will need to get home and gather up our families before we can even consider bugging out.

- **Local roads being overly crowded to get home**

- **Highways being overly crowded for evacuation, resulting in gridlock**
- [Trouble finding fuel](#)

Plan Your Route Carefully

The key to both getting home successfully and bugging out successfully, without becoming caught in gridlock, is careful [planning of your route](#). That means avoiding high traffic areas, where everyone else is likely to go.

Accomplishing that effectively requires knowing the potential traffic bottlenecks. The best way to find those is to travel the roads during high traffic times. You probably do that anyway, when it comes to getting home from work; but it's going to take some special trips to find those areas along your bug out route.

Some of the more common areas to find these bottlenecks are major roads and highways, on and off ramps, and major intersections. Traffic lights can be a serious problem, as people will rush to fill the gap when the light changes, ending up stuck in the intersection when it changes again.

Ideally, you want a route that takes as much advantage of backroads as possible, as those will often only be known by the locals. People heading through an area will only know the main roads, if anything.

Often, they're only following their phone's GPS or directions that someone gave them. This leaves the backroads emptier, which will often result in the traffic moving faster. Of course, "faster" is a relative term. It might still seem slow, but will probably be faster than the main roads.

The US Air Force has a system that they use for mission planning of bombing missions, where they don't limit themselves to one route in and out. Rather, they develop what

can best be described as a web of routes, with crossover points, which provides them with the ability to make changes enroute, should something happen or be discovered to make the original planned route unusable.

For example, they could have a primary route that is a direct penetration from their air base to the target. While flying the mission, an enemy ship might be discovered at sea, performing radar picket duties, making the chance of their discovery unacceptably high.

To avoid that risk, the pilot could choose to take a crossover to an alternate route. Since they would have already planned for that possibility, they would know what bearings to fly and what waypoints to use, as well as being sure they have sufficient fuel for the additional flight time.

We can [create a similar route map](#) for our bug out, using county roads and secondary highways for the various “legs” of our web. This provides flexibility for bugging out, as we will already know what alternatives are available, in the sense that they actually go through, in the event that our way is blocked.

Be Prepared to Bug Out

One of the many things that can slow down your bug out is taking the time to locate everything you need and pack it. This is why the prepping community puts so much effort into [bug out bags](#). The bug out bag ensures that you’ll have at least [the basics to survive](#), if you have to leave in a hurry.

That’s not to say that you should stop at a bug out bag. If you’re going to be driving anyway and you’re going to have extra room in your vehicle, you may as well fill that space up with additional food, clothing, water, and other necessities.

That means [having those things pre-packed](#) or able to be thrown

into a suitcase in a matter of seconds. If you can't get it into a suitcase or other container and into the vehicle in a couple of minutes, you'll need to leave it behind.

In addition to those additional supplies, you want to be sure that your vehicle is ready for travel. That means having [a vehicle emergency kit](#), containing such things as tools, spare belts and hoses, water, jumper cables and other vehicle emergency gear. Keep your gas tank at least half full and have enough gas in cans to fill it at least once, if not twice.

[Storing gas for an extended period](#) in a gas can is problematic, as it [loses its potency](#) after about six months. The easy solution is to rotate your gas stock, putting the gas from the cans into your tank every few months and replacing it with fresh gas. Metal cans are better for this, as less of the highly-volatile hydrocarbons can be lost from the gas.

Timing is Critical

The most critical part of making your bug out effective is timing. Ideally, you want to beat the rush. That means making your own decision to bug out, before government officials call for a general evacuation. If you choose to bug out before they call for that evacuation, you can beat everyone else to the roads and avoid the gridlock that is sure to occur.

In order for this to happen, you're going to have to keep yourself plugged in to prime sources of information. I'm not talking about the news here, as everyone else will be getting their information from there.

Rather, I'm talking about the types of sources that the news media uses to get their information, such as the [National Hurricane Center](#). Such sources will provide the earliest possible warning, sometimes several days before a natural disaster occurs.

Another good source of information is to get a police scanner and listen in on police calls. The police and fire departments are the city's premiere emergency response team and therefore must be kept aware of everything that is going on. They will have more and better information than just about anyone. Listening in on their channels should provide you with the latest information.

If you can't get out of town before the rush starts, you might very well be better off waiting until everyone has left. Sitting in traffic waiting isn't effective use of your time and being caught on the road will be worse than being caught at home, in most cases.

Consider Alternative Vehicles

While this article isn't intended to be [about bug out vehicles](#), there are a few things that I need to mention, because they affect your ability to beat the traffic. The first of these is the utility of four-wheel-drive in a bug out situation. Many people think of four-wheel-drive for getting off road in remote areas, up in the mountains. But that's not the only place that four-wheel-drive can be an advantage.

While you're bugging out, the worst place will probably be intersections, as traffic from both directions tries to get through. The ability to go off-road at this point, cutting across someone's lawn or through a field may save you a lot of time. For this, you probably don't need the four-wheel-drive traction as much as you need the ground clearance that those vehicles have.

But before deciding on this, you need to think through just what you're willing to do with that vehicle. Cutting through someone's yard might mean breaking down their fence too. Are you willing to pay for the fence, if they manage to get your license plate number? Are you willing to take a risk on your vehicle's paint job getting scratched up, as you go through

that fence?

There's always a risk of getting stuck when you go off-road, so you'll need to be prepared for it. That means having a winch to pull yourself out with, as well as other tools and additional cable. Practice using them, under realistic conditions, so that you'll be ready when the time comes.

While four-wheel-drive vehicles provide certain advantages, they aren't the only vehicles that do.

Vehicles with two wheels, like motorcycles and bicycles can go between lines of traffic, allowing you to get through, when everyone else is caught in gridlock. We've all seen people do this, usually while we grumble about them under our breath. But when a bug out situation comes, they have a real advantage over the rest of us.

While a motorcycle or bicycle doesn't give you the cargo space, if there's just two of you, it might be an option which allows you to bug out much quicker than other people can. There's a tradeoff here, but it's one that some people should consider.

If you need to be able to bug out quicker, then it might make sense to give up that cargo space, prepositioning your supplies, rather than taking them with you. Of course, prepositioning supplies is something we all should do, so that's not a big problem.

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