

Commuter Emergency Plan Checklist

A practical vehicle-and-route checklist for getting home safely when roads, bridges, transit, weather, or infrastructure disrupt your normal commute.

1. Know Your Routes

- Identify your normal route and its major choke points.
- Choose an alternate driving route that does not immediately rejoin the same bottleneck.
- Create a no-vehicle backup plan: safe place, transit option, pickup point, or realistic walking route.
- Download offline maps and keep a paper regional map in the vehicle.
- Know which bridges, tunnels, passes, or flood-prone roads your commute depends on.

2. Vehicle Essentials

- Drinking water appropriate for your commute, passengers, season, and climate.
- Shelf-stable snacks.
- First-aid kit and essential personal medications.
- Flashlight and hands-free headlamp.
- Phone charging cable, vehicle charger, and charged power bank.
- Walking shoes, extra socks, work gloves, and rain protection.
- Warm layer plus blanket or emergency blanket.
- Printed emergency contacts and roadside-assistance information.

3. Automotive Readiness

- Check tires and tire pressure regularly.
- Know whether your vehicle has a spare tire or manufacturer repair kit.
- Carry a tire inflator if appropriate for your vehicle.
- Keep jumper cables or a portable jump starter.
- Keep basic tools you actually know how to use.
- Maintain a reasonable fuel level so you have options during detours or delays.
- Keep up with battery, brakes, lights, wipers, fluids, and scheduled maintenance.

4. Seasonal & Regional Add-Ons

- Winter: ice scraper, warm gloves, hat, insulation, and appropriate traction equipment.
- Summer: extra drinking water and sun protection.
- Wildfire season: monitor official alerts and air quality; keep an appropriate N95 respirator when needed.
- Flood season: know alternate routes and never drive through a closed or flooded roadway.
- Earthquake country: plan for bridge inspections, road damage, and long transportation delays.

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Your goal is not to get home fastest. Your goal is to keep enough options to get somewhere safe.

5. Family Communication Plan

- Decide who contacts whom during a transportation emergency.
- Choose a backup meeting location and an out-of-area contact.
- Decide who is responsible for children or dependent family members.
- Keep important phone numbers somewhere other than only in your phone.
- Agree on what to do if calls fail: try short texts and set a time for the next update.

6. Before You Start Driving

- Check official road, weather, evacuation, and transportation information.
- Confirm that your planned route is usable before joining a major traffic backup.
- Ask whether your current location is safer than the road.
- Do not assume an alternate bridge or highway is open.
- Fuel earlier when a major storm, wildfire, evacuation warning, or other disruption is developing.

7. If You Become Stranded

- Stay calm and reassess before leaving the vehicle.
- Use the vehicle for shelter when remaining there is safer than traveling on foot.
- Tell family where you are, your plan, and when you will update them.
- Conserve phone battery and use backup power when needed.
- Leave the vehicle only when conditions, authorities, or a clearly safer destination justify it.
- If walking, consider distance, weather, footwear, water, daylight, terrain, and bridge access first.

8. Road Blockages & Human Encounters

- Keep doors locked and maintain space to maneuver when practical.
- Avoid arguments or unnecessary confrontation; do not exit merely to challenge someone blocking the road.
- Back away or turn around when a safe route exists.
- Follow lawful directions from emergency personnel.
- Call 911 if you are in immediate danger and can safely do so.

9. Quick Maintenance Check

- Inspect food and water supplies.
- Recharge the power bank and test flashlights.
- Review first-aid supplies and essential medications.
- Swap seasonal clothing and equipment.
- Update maps, emergency contacts, and alternate routes.

STAY INFORMED. KEEP OPTIONS OPEN. GET HOME SAFELY.