NEW ORLEANS — Incorporating painful lessons learned from Katrina, Mayor Ray Nagin and other city leaders unveiled a new hurricane evacuation plan Tuesday that relies on buses, planes and trains to get residents, pets and guests out of harm’s way.

It does not, however, include a shelter of last resort for those who choose to ride out a storm in New Orleans.

Nagin said the Louisiana Superdome, which was jammed during Katrina with more than 20,000 evacuees who languished there in miserable conditions for days, plays no role in the new plan.

The Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, also a scene of despair for thousands of post-Katrina evacuees who had no food or water after the storm, will be used solely as a staging area for evacuations, the mayor said.

The convention hall will not be equipped with cots, he added.

“Read my lips. This is a plan for getting people out of this city. There is no shelter of last resort,” the mayor told reporters during a packed news conference at City Hall. He added that personal responsibility — residents devising their own evacuation plans — is a key component of the city’s strategy.

Nagin, widely criticized for calling for a mandatory evacuation the day before Katrina made landfall, said anything above a Category 2 hurricane will trigger a mandatory evacuation of the sub-sea level city. The call will go out 30 to 36 hours before expected landfall, he said.

“Any time a storm is in the Gulf (of Mexico), we get to work,” he said. “We don’t have a lot of time to fool around.”

The mayor said temporary travel trailers become “unstable” once winds reach 40 to 50 mph, so special attention will be paid to residents in those trailers in an effort to evacuate them.

The city knows where all trailers are, he said, so what he called “reverse 911 calls” will be placed to those residents in advance of a storm.

A new wrinkle in the city’s hurricane evacuation plan includes the use of Amtrak trains to transport the elderly and those with special medical needs out of the city. Buses will take those people to the Union Passenger Terminal on Loyola Avenue near Interstate 10.
The mayor said federal Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff was instrumental in getting Amtrak on board.