

TESTIMONY

OF

JOHN O'CONNOR

VICE PRESIDENT AND CHIEF OF POLICE

AMTRAK

60 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE, NE

WASHINGTON, DC 20002

202-906-3042

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION SECURITY

OF THE

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

THURSDAY, MAY 31, 2012

2:00 P.M.

311 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

Good Afternoon, Mr. Chairman and Members of the House Homeland Security Transportation Security Subcommittee.

I've been dealing with the challenges of rail and transit security since the beginning of my career. I joined the Long Island Rail Road Police Department in the early 1970, and served there before coming to Amtrak in 1998. Since coming to Amtrak, I've been responsible for the development of security strategies, the implementation of security countermeasures, and the delivery of uniformed, investigative and special operations police services for Amtrak systemwide. A lot has changed since I first put on a uniform, and while the task of developing a safer and more secure passenger rail system has always been a demanding one, I think we've been fortunate in the support we've received from our President and Chief Executive Officer, Joe Boardman. Mr. Boardman takes safety and security issues very seriously, and he has worked hard to ensure that we have the resources we need to do the job.

Since the September 11, 2001 attacks, every American has become conscious of the potential for terrorist action, or has heard about the thwarted attempts of terrorists to conduct attacks within our borders where more than 50 terror plots have been foiled. Overseas, terror organizations have repeatedly attacked surface transportation services. In 2011, the Mineta Institute reported that since the 9/11 attacks, terrorists have carried out 1,804 attacks on bus and rail targets, killing more than 3,904 people. For rail, the list of attacks and the numbers of casualties makes sobering reading:

- 2003 – Yessentuki, Russia – 42 killed, 150 injured
- 2004 – Moscow, Russia – 40 killed, 200 wounded
- 2004 – Madrid, Spain – 191 people killed, 1850 injured
- 2005 – London, England – 52 killed, 700 injured
- 2006 – Mumbai, India – 209 killed, 809 injured
- 2008 – Mumbai, India – 164 killed, 308 injured
- 2010 – Moscow, Russia – 39 killed, 70 injured
- 2011 – Minsk, Belarus – 15 killed, 200 injured

We know that Al Qaeda continue to urge even more attacks through its *Inspire* magazine, the Internet, and other means. The above list is far from complete, for it doesn't include some of the smaller and less lethal attacks, but it does make something clear: terrorism as a tactic is not limited by location, by cause, or by any ethnic or confessional constraints. It is a tactic used by a wide range of conspiratorial organizations across the world who are unmoored from any ethical constraint and who are willing to kill innocent people in the hope that by so doing, governments and peoples will be forced to alter not just policies, but their fundamental natures.

With regard to today's hearing, I think that goal is particularly important, because the purpose of agencies like the TSA is not just to protect our lives, but our way of life. Over the past decade, Federal agencies have worked unremittingly to accomplish this end, and I think it's fair to say, there have been many successes. But, rail infrastructure continues to be a terrorist target, and consequently, we will need to have federal agencies like TSA be leaders in this struggle and to be a model for law enforcement organizations to emulate. Clearly, we must make sure we are taking every reasonable effort to remain vigilant to mitigate this potential threat.

Against this background, Amtrak, through the Amtrak Police Department (APD), tries to do its part. It has been transformed into a mobile and fluid department that uses diverse patrol tactics and unique police operations to improve security on the Amtrak rail system. Our cornerstone philosophy is predicated on what we call the 3 Ps – Prevention, Partnerships, and Participation. This approach is designed to inform and coordinate the efforts of APD, partner law enforcement agencies ranging from local police forces to the DHS and TSA, individual employee efforts, and passenger reporting to help keep our system safe and secure.

In this regard, TSA has been a good federal partner for APD. They have supported many APD prevention initiatives, including the expansion of our canine program of which I am particularly proud. Presently, Amtrak has over 50 explosive canine detection teams. A portion of these teams are “vapor wake” trained, a new technique which trains one canine to cover and screen large areas of transportation facilities. The dog’s keen sense of smell is the foundation for this application, as explosive components can be detected in the residual scent left by people walking through a station’s corridor or platform. As APD has developed new patrol and counterterrorism tactics by increasing train riding patrols, instituting random and unpredictable surges, baggage screenings, and improving police officer training, DHS and TSA grant programs have provided us with much-needed funding to carry out these improvements and operations.

From a partnership view, TSA has also been at our side for programs designed to create greater cooperation and support among all law enforcement agencies for security issues related to rail surface transportation. APD and TSA have performed over 1700 VIPR Operations and our agencies perform joint baggage screening operations on a regular basis in many large Amtrak stations, including New York, Washington, and Chicago.

TSA also supported APD’s initiative to start Operation RAILS SAFE. This effort uses deployment exercises and various tactical deployments to educate state and local agencies about the rail environment on which their citizens travel and demonstrate organized law enforcement activities at surface transportation locations. The last RAILS SAFE exercise in April of this year involved 190 agencies in 38 states, Canada, and the District of Columbia.

Additionally, Amtrak participation programs for employee training and passenger awareness have been accomplished with DHS/TSA collaboration and backing.

Other security supported efforts include:

- Voluntary participation in the BASE analysis for the NEC where Amtrak earned the TSA “Gold Standard” designation;
- Support for the Northeast Coalition to bring more local police offices in rail environments and for the APD membership in RAILPOL to expand intelligence and information sharing with EC Rail Police agencies;
- APD is charter member of the Mass Transit PAG; and
- Amtrak is a TSA R&D “test bed” agency.

That being said, in today's tough economic times, I think it would be prudent to ensure that all of TSA's efforts make the best possible use of their respective budget allocations. One program in particular that I agree is worth closer examination is the Surface Transportation Security Inspector program.

Amtrak's experience with this program has been somewhat mixed. On the one hand, the program has been helpful to us in its BASE assessment of our Northeast Corridor. On the other hand, Amtrak has encountered difficulties over interpretation of regulations by different TSA field offices. Informal inquiry with several offices has revealed mission confusion and disconnects among offices and TSA HQ's at times. Today, the program is at least partially overseen by some 68 Federal Security Directors who often have airline security as a higher priority in their view of their responsibilities. It is not clear to Amtrak that this is the best structure for surface transportation, and it is also unclear whether the program, as funded and structured, continues to add value to overall security efforts. Our preference would be that the program take on a more operational focus.

In closing, I think the TSA deserves high marks for its surface transportation security efforts, notwithstanding improvements that could be made to its Surface Transportation Inspector program, and I look forward to answering any questions you may have about our transportation security program.

Amtrak is America's Railroad®, the nation's intercity passenger rail service and its high-speed rail operator. A record 30.2 million passengers traveled on Amtrak in FY 2011 on more than 300 daily trains – at speeds up to 150 mph (241 kph) – that connect 46 states, the District of Columbia and three Canadian Provinces. Amtrak operates intercity trains in partnership with 15 states and contracts with 13 commuter rail agencies to provide a variety of services. Enjoy the JourneySM at Amtrak.com or call 800-USA-RAIL for schedules, fares and more information. Join us on [facebook.com/Amtrak](https://www.facebook.com/Amtrak) and follow us at twitter.com/Amtrak.