

Statement of Ranking Member Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX)
Subcommittee on Transportation Security
Committee on Homeland Security

**“TSA’s Surface Inspection Program: Strengthening Security or Squandering
Scant Resources?”**

May 31, 2012

I would like to start by thanking our witnesses for appearing before the Subcommittee today to provide Members with their valuable insights on critical transportation issues impacting our economy, security and our progress as a Nation.

As ranking member of the Transportation Security Subcommittee, I have continuously supported the allocation of adequate resources aimed at enhancing the efficiency, safety and security of our rail and mass transit systems.

That is why I offered an amendment to a surface transportation security measure recently considered by the full committee. My amendment would authorize \$400 million dollars for the Transportation Security Grant Program in Fiscal Year 2012 and Fiscal Year 2013. The amendment was unanimously supported.

I am pleased that Members on both sides of the aisle recognized the need to authorize these funds. In the near future, the House will consider the FY 2013 Department of Homeland Security Appropriations bill.

I respectfully request that my colleagues continue their strong commitment to transportation security grant funding when the appropriations measure is on the floor of the House.

I cannot overstate the importance of funding for grants that allow state and local jurisdictions to secure our nation’s transportation infrastructure.

According to the National Counter Terrorism Center, since January 2004, over 1000 terrorist attacks were waged worldwide against mass transit and passenger rail targets, resulting in over 2,000 deaths and over 9,000 injuries. Many such attacks have targeted major cities in other nations—including Madrid, London, Mumbai and Moscow. We also know that a plot to attack the New York City subway system was revealed in 2009.

Given the open nature of our mass transportation system and the millions of people who use our subways, buses and highways each day, the effort to assure adequate funding for transportation security grants should be a high priority for this Congress.

Since the demise of Osama bin Laden, it has been revealed in the public domain that terrorists continue to be interested in developing plots to attack mass transit systems.

This threat, however, is not new, and it is imperative that we continue to examine how the Department of Homeland Security and the Transportation Security Administration are addressing the current and evolving threat to our transportation systems.

Last year, I introduced the “Surface Transportation and Mass Transit Security Act of 2011.” If enacted, this bill would assure that TSA provides the kind of attention and resources necessary to effectively operate surface and mass transit security programs. The bill authorizes the hiring of additional surface inspectors to validate security programs that impact our surface and mass transit security.

Today’s hearing title indicates that significant challenges exist for the Surface Inspector Program. But I would caution that we must not throw the baby out with the bathwater. It seems that TSA is beginning to make some necessary changes in this program. I commend TSA for hiring additional Transportation Security Inspectors. This is a good first step. However, the agency must also ensure that regulations impacting training of frontline workers across surface and mass transit are issued and shared for public comment.

Without an overarching framework, single acts and individual programs are likely to have little impact.

Part of this overarching framework must include the kind of mechanisms in my bill—such as a protocol to strengthen stakeholder outreach, revisions to the public transportation security assistance grants program and a recognition of the importance of increased resources for canine teams.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today on how outreach and coordination efforts by TSA have enhanced their respective security missions.

Further, I look forward to receiving testimony regarding the progress made by the First Observer program, formerly known as Highway Watch. Last year, it was reported that this program played a role in thwarting two serious attacks.

The testimony today will provide the opportunity to discuss what TSA needs to do to facilitate programs that will enhance the security posture of the communities represented by these stakeholders.