

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****TSA's Surface Inspection Program: Strengthening Security or Squandering Scant Resources?***

May 31, 2012 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Transportation Security subcommittee hearing entitled “TSA’s Surface Inspection Program: Strengthening Security or Squandering Scant Resources?”:

“Last Congress, under Democratic leadership, we held several hearings and conducted rigorous oversight of the security of all modes of transportation. Today, the hearing suggests that we will evaluate one part of the Department’s surface mass transportation security programs.

It is unfortunate that neither TSA nor the Inspector General could be here to provide greater context on the security challenges we will explore today. I look forward to testimony from TSA and the IG at future hearings. Additionally, if it becomes clear that TSA has not adequately engaged the stakeholders, I hope that the Subcommittee will raise those concerns with TSA.

The Ranking Member has discussed the threat posed by terrorists to mass transportation systems in other nations. This Subcommittee must ask whether Congress is doing enough to ensure that this nation’s highways, subways and rail systems are safe.

The 9/11 Act clearly set forth TSA’s responsibilities in securing all modes of transportation. Unfortunately, TSA’s record of implementing functional surface security programs does not indicate that the agency has branched out from an almost singular focus on aviation security.

While I recognize the importance of aviation security, I also know that we cannot move forward if we only look back. And in this instance, forward movement would not be extremely difficult. For instance, there are two critical surface regulations required by the 9/11 Act to address frontline employee security training and security assessments.

Those regulations are more than three years overdue. Publishing those regulations for notice and comment would constitute forward movement. Ensuring that our owners, operators and frontline workers receive the proper guidance and training for security awareness is critical to creating the kind of layered security system in surface transportation that we strive to create in aviation.

Today, we will hear about a TSA-administered program that begins to build the foundation for such training regulations. First Observer, with a limited budget, has managed to garner the endorsement of 137 industries and affiliate associations. I look forward to hearing more about the program and how our witnesses propose that we work together to build a comprehensive surface and mass transit security program.

I also want to take a moment to address DHS’s delays in fully implementing the Transportation Worker Identification Credential (TWIC) Program.

The SAFE Port Act of 2006 authorizes the TWIC Program to be administered jointly by TSA and the Coast Guard. The TWIC program focuses on protecting the Nation's maritime transportation facilities and vessels.

After initial delays, all maritime workers were required to obtain biometric TWICs by April 2009.

To date, over 2 million longshoremen, truckers, merchant mariners, and rail and vessel crew members have undergone extensive homeland security and criminal background checks to secure TWICs.

However, DHS has made little progress in establishing nationwide standards for TWIC readers. The law required DHS to issue final regulations for the deployment of TWIC readers based on pilot results by April 2011. I have received reports that the TWIC program will not be fully implemented until late 2014.

Under current law, beginning in October 2012, workers will be required to renew their TWICs at a cost of \$132.50 each. I would hope that the Department will find a way to assure that these workers will not have to pay this renewal fee until card readers are in place and operational.

I welcome our witnesses today and look forward to a frank assessment of the problems and potential solutions for moving forward and strengthening TSA's surface transportation security program."

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