

**STATEMENT OF
JOHN PORCARI
DEPUTY SECRETARY
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**

BEFORE THE

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT, INTERGOVERNMENTAL
RELATIONS, AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
U.S. SENATE**

HEARING ON

One Year Later: Examining the Ongoing Recovery from Hurricane Sandy

November 6, 2013

Chairman Begich, Ranking Member Paul, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for inviting me to appear before you today to highlight the Department of Transportation's (DOT) role in assisting communities devastated by Hurricane Sandy just over one year ago.

This historic storm triggered the worst public transit disaster in the history of the United States. At the height of the event, it disrupted more than half of our nation's transportation services, and impacted more than one-third of the nation's transit ridership in the days following the storm. The storm affected 24 states, including the entire eastern seaboard from Florida to Maine and west across the Appalachian Mountains to Michigan and Wisconsin.

We worked with our state partners and the private sector to proactively address the challenges posed by the impending superstorm—and these efforts made a tremendous difference in our ability to respond swiftly and responsibly, with the goal of helping the region restore access to vital transportation services for the millions of people who depend on them daily.

New York City's subway system was shut down on October 28, a day in advance of the storm surge, and remained closed through November 1. Washington DC Metro service, both rail and bus, were cancelled, as well as Maryland Transit buses, light rail, Amtrak, and MARC train service.

The storm also caused widespread disruptions to the nation's air traffic, particularly at airports located from Washington, DC to Boston, MA. The ripple effects of Hurricane Sandy contributed to the cancellation of nearly 19,000 commercial flights nationwide scheduled for October 28-29th. The storm also caused significant damage to navigational aids and other critical aviation infrastructure, particularly in the New York City metropolitan area.

Initial Response Efforts

Immediately following the storm, we worked closely with our federal and state partners to ensure fast, efficient transport of power sources, fuel, and supplies to speed recovery efforts. Working with other agencies and the White House, we administered a host of waivers, special permits, and other regulatory flexibilities to expedite operations in the aftermath of the storm.

Despite the storm's significant impact on the nation's aviation system, the Department's Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), working with the affected airlines, airport authorities, and other key aviation stakeholders, was able to return air traffic in the impacted areas to normal operations by Wednesday morning, October 31, except at the NYC metropolitan airports, which were the hardest hit. The agency and its partners were able to largely resume normal air traffic operations at NYC's major airports by Friday, November 2. In parallel, the FAA also worked with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and other federal and State interagency partners to facilitate response and recovery air missions using numerous flight advisories addressing airspace stretching from Florida to Maine.

In addition to deploying staff to the region to begin damage assessments, our Federal Transit Administration (FTA) worked closely with FEMA and the General Services Administration (GSA) to secure as many as 350 buses to replace lost commuter rail and transit service in New Jersey. Working with FEMA, FTA engaged its staff and project management oversight contractors to conduct continuing damage assessments and cost-validation work for both operating and capital costs associated with restoring and rebuilding transit capacity.

The Department's Maritime Administration (MARAD) was able to dispatch vessels for emergency relief. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) initially provided \$59 million in quick-release emergency relief funds within weeks of the storm to get roads, bridges, and tunnels on the path toward recovery.

The Disaster Relief Appropriations Act

On January 28, 2013, Congress passed the Disaster Relief Appropriations Act, which authorized \$60.4 billion to fund federal resources for response, recovery, and hazard mitigation assistance in all affected states. The appropriation included funding for flood insurance payments, repairs to homes and public infrastructure, and funds to help affected communities prepare for future storms. Of this amount, the Department of Transportation's programs received \$13.1 billion. This funding was further reduced by about \$650 million due to sequestration reductions required by the Budget Control Act.

The Disaster Relief Appropriations Act provided \$10.2 billion to FTA for a new Public Transportation Emergency Relief Program authorized last year as part of Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21). This new program provided a critical framework for addressing the devastation caused by the Hurricane Sandy disaster. Of the total amount provided to FTA's Emergency Relief program, up to \$4.7 billion may be used for mitigation activities that would strengthen the damaged infrastructure to withstand similar events in the future. In order to ensure proper management of these funds, \$5.7 million of the total provided is to be transferred to the Office of the Inspector General for oversight activities. FHWA's Emergency Relief Fund

received \$1.9 billion from the Disaster Relief Act. \$612 million is available for Hurricane Sandy relief and \$390 million for other events. Approximately \$919 million is available for future emergency relief needs.

The Federal Railroad Administration's (FRA) received \$112 million from the Disaster Relief Act in funding to assist Amtrak. Of the total amount, \$30.4 million was provided for repairs related to the consequences of Hurricane Sandy. The remaining \$81.7 million was provided to address needed resilience efforts to better protect Amtrak infrastructure from the impacts of future storms.

The FAA received \$28.5 million in Facilities and Equipment funds from the Disaster Relief Act to repair damage to FAA facilities, power systems, and equipment at eighteen locations that include three of the Nation's top 3 airports – LaGuardia, John F. Kennedy International, and Newark Liberty International.

Progress to Date

Since Hurricane Sandy, we have allocated almost \$7 billion across four DOT-operating administrations and have been coordinating closely with our federal, state, and local partners to speed the restoration of transportation mobility in affected states.

To date, the FHWA has provided \$672 million in emergency relief funding to states and for federal lands impacted by the storm. This includes funding to replace all the docks at Liberty Island destroyed by the storm and allowing the park to reopen in time for Independence Day. Critical coastal routes such as 15 miles of Ocean Parkway on New York's Long Island and 12 miles of Route 35 along the coast of New Jersey were heavily damaged. Ocean Parkway was fully reopened on April 25. Route 35 in New Jersey opened to traffic in February with temporary lanes and is progressing well with permanent repairs, including features to protect it against future storms.

Thus far, FTA has allocated \$5.7 billion to affected transit agencies for Sandy recovery activities and anticipated resilience projects. None of these rapid, early accomplishments to restore service would have been possible if FTA did not have the proper mechanism in place to facilitate action. The Emergency Relief Program is that mechanism, and I commend the Committee for granting our request in the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act to establish this essential program. When we proposed this program in the President's FY2012 budget, we envisioned it as an important mechanism for strengthening FTA's authority, on par with FHWA, to provide timely disaster assistance to transit agencies whose assets are damaged or destroyed. The program has more than proved its purpose in the wake of Hurricane Sandy, and with your support, the FTA's response stands as a model for federal disaster assistance and a powerful reminder of what our nation can accomplish when we all work together.

FRA provided \$30.4 million to Amtrak to repair damage along its heavily-traveled Northeast Corridor, as well as \$185 million in resilience funding to the Hudson Yards Right-of-Way Preservation project to help pave the way for two flood-resistant tunnels under the Hudson River, connecting New York and New Jersey. These efforts are significant not only in the recovery, rebuilding, and strengthening of the critical infrastructure of not just New York and New Jersey, but also to the entire Northeast Corridor. However, it is important to note that Amtrak cannot use

approximately \$81.7 million of funding for Northeast Corridor recovery and resilience due to a requirement that prohibits Amtrak from using any funds for capital and debt service grants for operating expenses, even temporarily. The practical effect of this provision is that Amtrak must forgo the completion of critical mitigation projects in order to fund operations.

The FAA has allocated \$28.5 million in emergency relief funding in states impacted by Sandy to repair critical FAA infrastructure, relocate equipment above the flood zone where practical, and take additional steps to protect National Airspace System (NAS) infrastructure from future floods. Additionally, the FAA worked closely with the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey and the Connecticut Department of Transportation to assess the damage and make recommendations for repair of the Engineered Materials Arresting System (EMAS) at John F. Kennedy International Airport, LaGuardia Airport, and Groton-New London Airport. As a result, each airport is currently in the process of replacing or repairing the EMAS beds. EMAS beds are an important safety system designed to safely stop aircraft from overrunning a runway.

Other Accomplishments

Our Senior Advisor for Accessible Transportation worked closely with FEMA to ensure that timely repairs and upgrades to public transportation and paratransit services were made in order to meet the needs of people with disabilities.

We established a “One-Stop Shop” Information Website during the hurricane response to expedite oversize/overweight vehicle permitting and assist with toll information, waivers, and other transportation related issues. Based on the success of this website, we developed a Department-wide Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery Information Website that can be accessed at www.dot.gov/emergency. During emergency situations, we will post information related to transportation permits, waivers, and other regulations and authorities that are applicable during an emergency to assist all public and private transportation organizations. The website contains links to each of our operating administration’s emergency websites and the Emergency Support Function – 1 (Transportation) Partner agencies. During emergencies, a link to the website will be located on our main webpage (www.dot.gov).

Coordination with Hurricane Sandy Rebuilding Task Force

As a result of the extreme devastation caused by the storm, President Obama convened a Hurricane Sandy Rebuilding Task Force, composed of the leaders of federal agencies responsible for various aspects of the recovery. Housing and Urban Development Secretary, Shaun Donovan, chairs the Task Force and we were an active participant. We worked with the other Task Force agencies to issue the Hurricane Sandy Rebuilding Strategy report in August 2013, laying out key principles for recovery, as well as recommendations for federally supported recovery efforts. Those recommendations will be incorporated in our forthcoming competitive resilience funding program.

We were proactive in implementing the Federal Flood Risk Reduction Standard adopted by the Task Force for all Sandy-related transportation repairs and resilience projects funded by the supplemental spending bill. FTA has included the standard in its interim final rule for its Emergency Relief Program. The implementation of this standard means that all transportation

infrastructure built in the Sandy impacted region will adhere to a higher standard, which accounts for the latest floodplain and sea level rise data. One example of how we are implementing this standard is elevating mechanical equipment so it is not damaged by future flooding. We have also extended the resilience principles to our efforts responding to and recovering from the Colorado floods. Rebuilding in a resilient manner will be our standard for all future events.

Improving Infrastructure Resilience

Hurricane Sandy and other recent disasters underscore the nation's vulnerability to extreme weather events under current climate conditions. Scientific evidence indicates climate change is already altering the intensity, duration, and timing of extreme meteorological events in some regions of the U.S., including floods, droughts and heat waves, and these effects are expected to intensify over time.

Our first and highest priority for fostering resilience among transit systems is to better protect existing transit facilities and equipment from the impact of the next disaster. Taxpayers should not be asked to pay for the restoration and recovery of public transportation assets a second or third time. And transit riders should not have to put up with the stress, cost, and inconvenience of having the same transit facilities destroyed by one storm after another.

We issued a report just before Hurricane Irene and more than a year before Hurricane Sandy: “Flooded Bus Barns and Buckled Rails: Public Transportation and Climate Change Adaptation.” This report provides professionals with information and analysis relevant to making U.S. public transportation assets and services more resilient to climate change impacts. The report provides examples of adaptation strategies and discusses how transit agencies might incorporate climate change adaptation into their organizational structures and existing activities, such as asset management systems, planning, and emergency response.

Our first allocation of emergency relief funds provided \$2 billion to help protect, repair, reconstruct, and replace public transit equipment and facilities. The second allocation included an additional \$3.7 billion in funds to four of the area’s most affected transit agencies, of which \$1.3 billion has been allocated for locally prioritized resilience projects. This funding is primarily targeted to resilience improvements that could be accomplished in tandem with investments to repair infrastructure damaged in the storm, thereby better preparing them to withstand future disasters. We will soon issue a Notice of Funding Availability for capital projects that will reduce risk of damage from future disasters in the region impacted by Hurricane Sandy. This funding will be available on a competitive basis and allocated consistent with all relevant regional and local planning efforts.

These new competitive resilience grants will be modeled in part on our successful Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) program and evaluated based on published criteria. We are taking appropriate elements of the TIGER model and addressing the Infrastructure Resilience Guidelines, and other resilience principles, to develop a specific program for the Sandy-affected region. The overall goal of the new program is to ensure the region’s transportation systems can continue to serve their critical function in the face of future disasters and the impacts of climate change.

The President's Climate Action Plan describes our efforts to enhance resilience as part of the rebuilding process following Hurricane Sandy and we will continue to build upon these efforts as directed in the November 1, 2013 Executive Order on Preparing the United States for the Impacts of Climate Change. Federal investment in the improved resilience of public transportation systems is intended to reduce the economic and social consequences of future disasters, including both the potential cost of rebuilding after the next storm and the social and economic consequences of suspended or inoperable transit service on the public. In the New York-New Jersey region, it is particularly important to focus on regional investments that protect the larger transit network—a network that serves more transit passengers than any other region of the country. Absent adequate regional coordination and planning, investments to protect one rail yard against rising waters might only serve to flood a neighboring rail yard that supports services to an even greater number of passengers. As such, we will be particularly supportive of regional solutions that address the protection of the transit network on the whole.

We have already coordinated funding development and implementation with FEMA, and will continue to do so with the development of our competitive program. The NOFA will provide for consultation with FEMA and other members of the Task Force in the review of project proposals, and we will be working with our state and local partners to implement a full spectrum of mitigation methods to secure roadways and transit systems from extreme weather events in the future, and to explore creative solutions to addressing flood and storm risks in locations vulnerable to repetitive loss, as well as evaluating existing transportation infrastructure for latent defects.

In collaboration with state and local transportation agencies in Connecticut, New Jersey, and New York, we have launched an initiative that will assess the damage from Hurricane Sandy on the region's transportation systems and help learn how to enhance the region's resilience to extreme weather in the long term. The initiative will leverage lessons learned from Sandy and other recent storms, as well as future climate projections, to develop feasible, cost-effective strategies to reduce the transportation system's vulnerability to future extreme weather events. To date, FHWA has established a group of state and local project partners and, in coordination with FTA and FRA, this group is currently working to collect and analyze information on transportation assets damaged by Hurricane Sandy and to identify specific assets for further study.

In summary, significant resources were authorized in the Disaster Relief Act to fund resilient transportation infrastructure investments. Even so, the need for resilience investments exceeds the resources available. As a result, the Federal Government has an interest in the limited resources available being targeted to those projects that offer the greatest possible benefits--disaster resilience prominent among these.

Next Steps

As discussed in his Climate Action Plan and his resulting November 1, 2013 Executive Order on Preparing the United States for the Impacts of Climate Change, President Obama directed federal agencies to identify and remove barriers to making climate-resilient investments; identify and remove counterproductive policies that increase vulnerabilities; and encourage and support smarter, more resilient investments through agency grants, technical assistance, and other

programs, in sectors from transportation and water management to conservation and disaster relief.

First, we need to build our transportation systems so that they are more resilient in the face of high winds and storm surges. As the most significant damage was to tunnels, we need to design highway, rail, and subway tunnels so that they are more resistant to flooding, permit safer egress of those that are in the tunnels at the time of the event, and make it easier to rebound and reopen quickly after an event. New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) had taken some steps, in response to past flooding due to intense rainstorms and Hurricane Irene in 2011, to make subway tunnels more flood-proof. These efforts have included raising station entrances and ventilating grates, improving pumps, and pre-deploying pumps and personnel to speed MTA's emergency response capability. Unfortunately, these efforts were clearly not enough and we need to do more.

Second, as a next step, we need to provide transportation agencies with better information, new designs, and tools to enhance the resilience of their infrastructure. We are conducting research to help identify vulnerable infrastructure and ways of increasing resistance to damage. For example, throughout 2013, the FHWA is working with 19 state and regional partners and other federal agencies to test approaches for assessing vulnerability of local transportation infrastructure to climate change and extreme weather and how to improve resilience. Additionally, our Turner Fairbank Highway Research Center has a focused research and development program to develop hazard mitigation technologies and methodologies to improve the capability of our highway bridges and structures to resist flooding, storm surges and wind hazards.

We also need to design and plan for more redundancy into our transportation system, to enhance regional resilience so that when one part of the system goes down, other parts can pick up the slack. We could see the importance of this in the reaction to Hurricane Sandy. When the subway tunnels went down, we were able to deploy more transit buses. We enhanced the effectiveness of transit buses by creating more bus-only lanes. We relied more on ferry service, and established dedicated transit bus lines to transport passengers to the ferry terminals.

Third, we need to address these problems in a regional way. Particularly for the New York metropolitan area, which extends across parts of three states, the need for a regional approach is critical. Local agency collaboration occurred only in the aftermath of the storm. The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority, and the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council, of course, provide venues for regional planning and coordination. Such regional planning and coordination must address regional concerns so that joint applications for the competitive grant awards can be developed such that an investment in protection and resilience could cross local jurisdictional boundaries. Other coordinating mechanisms, such as the Northeast Corridor (NEC) Commission, the I-95 Corridor Coalition, and the Coalition of Northeastern Governors, provide additional opportunities to coordinate transportation and resilience planning.

One promising effort is our NEC FUTURE program – an effort to define, evaluate, and prioritize future investment alternatives for the Northeast Corridor through the year 2040. This program will develop a Passenger Rail Corridor Investment Plan to guide investments in the Northeast

Corridor over the next 30 years. NEC FUTURE gives us the opportunity to develop a more resilient rail network in this corridor that provides redundancy for other passenger modes and grows out of a regional dialogue with states and other stakeholders in the corridor.

Part of that regional effort is the Gateway Project to expand rail capacity from New Jersey into New York Penn Station. This project, which would double passenger rail capacity between Newark and New York and expand capacity at Penn Station by 50 percent, is vital to meeting the future transportation needs of the New York region and to building in the redundancy needed to preserve transportation capacity in the face of events such as Hurricane Sandy. It would involve building a new tunnel under the Hudson River that would be designed to prevent flooding and to permit rapid recovery from emergencies and disruptions. It would also help protect Penn Station and other rail tunnels against future flooding.

An important caution is in order, however. Hurricane season is once again upon us. And, at present, the FTA has only those emergency relief funds that were made available exclusively for Hurricane Sandy. The President's FY 2013 and 2014 budget requests each sought \$25 million to capitalize the Emergency Relief program for disasters throughout the country. To date, Congress has not appropriated those funds. I strongly encourage the Congress to appropriate those funds so, when the next disaster strikes and takes public transportation systems offline, FTA will be in a position to respond immediately.

Conclusion

The bottom line is that we have resources available to identify at-risk infrastructure and fund resilient transportation investments. There is extensive collaboration among federal, state and local agencies to implement strategic resilience investments in tandem with the primary investment goal of providing for the recovery and rebuilding of the Hurricane Sandy region.

These investments will help reduce the need for a future recovery bill. Research has shown that every dollar spent by FEMA on actions to reduce disaster losses saves the nation almost \$4 in avoided impacts. We are hoping to realize similar cost savings to the American taxpayer by ensuring that our transportation infrastructure is built to withstand future storms.

We look forward to continued efforts to make meaningful progress with our transportation partners as they propose essential public transportation projects to further expedite recovery from Hurricane Sandy and lay the foundation for a more resilient future. We stand ready to provide the funds appropriated for this purpose as expeditiously as possible, while maintaining stringent oversight of taxpayer dollars. As we prepare the launch of our competitive resilience funding program, we will continue to work with our local, state, and federal partners to ensure that we rebuild Sandy-impacted infrastructure in a resilient manner.

I thank the Subcommittee for inviting me to testify today and would be happy to respond to any questions that you have.