



United States Senate

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

Chairman Joseph I. Lieberman, ID-Conn.

Opening Statement of Chairman Joseph Lieberman

“See Something, Say Something, Do Something: Next Steps for Securing Rail and Transit”

Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee

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As Prepared for Delivery

Good morning and welcome to our hearing today where we will discuss the security of our rail and transit systems and strategies for the future to improve the defense of these systems, which are historically open, and therefore in this post 9-11 world, vulnerable. This hearing is being held as part of a continuing series of hearings and investigations our committee has committed to do during this year as we approach the tenth commemoration of the attacks against America on 9-11. But in this particular case this hearing was also catalyzed by the reports from the raid on bin Laden’s compound, which yielded documents apparently indicating that Osama bin Laden continued to urge members of al Qaeda to attack the rail sector of the United States, particularly on or about the tenth anniversary of September 11. One of those apparently included a plan to derail a train. Some of the analysts we’ve talked to have concluded that most likely form of this attack would be multiple operatives acting independently against separate targets as part of a coordinated attacks on one system, of course usually at peak travel times. There’s also been a reference to bin Laden suggesting that these kinds of attacks might most dramatically on rail lines over valleys or bridges. In other words this made again real the threat to our rail and transit systems, which we’ve seen carried out in other places, Mumbai, the first attack, Madrid, London Moscow and of course plans which were thwarted right here in Washington D.C. and New York City. In fact the Mineta transportation institute issued a report that since September 11, on worldwide, 1,800 attacks have been carried out on surface transportation, mostly busses and trains, obviously not all of them major, causing over 3,900 deaths. Compare that to the 75 attacks carried out on airplanes and in airports that caused 157 deaths.

Add that with the fact that fourteen million people use these systems every day. In Connecticut, the Metro North New Haven line is one of the busiest rail lines in our country.

Speed, reliability, and convenience are hallmarks of mass transit, and we support mass transit as part of broader societal goals. But with so many passengers at so many stations, along so many paths, these systems are very difficult to secure. We certainly haven’t gone unsecure, and increasingly since 9/11 increased the level of surveillance cameras, explosive detecting dogs, security teams and of course greater public awareness. Secretary Napolitano, and Mr. Pistone also, has energetically promoted the “See Something, Say Something” public education campaign because the security of our rail system, does hinge in large part on the awareness and actions of an observant citizenry. But a decade after 9/11 as one of our witnesses, Dr. Stephen Flynn, directly suggest, we’ve got to move beyond “See Something, Say Something” to “DO something.” On transit security, of course traditionally the responsibility of state and local security, but in our time transportation security administration (TSA) has played a critical role. TSA has been working with state and local governments to improve rail and transit security and now has 25 mobile security teams (Visible Intermodal Prevention and Response or VIPR), one of the best acronyms that I think our government has, it sends into the field, and the President’s Fiscal Year 2012 budget requests 12 more of such teams. TSA also has 320 security inspectors working with local transit officials to assess the security of trains, platforms, and rail yards.

But there is much more TSA and state and local governments can and I think must do.

Let me just mention a few. First and foremost, TSA really needs to fulfill a 2007 legislative requirement to develop uniform standards for rail and transit training programs, for background checks for frontline employees and for transit agencies security plans. Second, the Department of Homeland Security I think should step up its efforts to develop creative, non-intrusive transit security solutions – especially to detect improvised explosive devices – which history has shown is the weapon of choice for disrupting rail and transit systems. As you know the Department of Homeland Security has a Science and Technology Directorate explicitly to achieve purposes like this, but specific R&D on rail and transit security innovations, in my opinion, has been much too limited.

Third, TSA I think has to improve its intelligence sharing with state and local officials. It's come a long way, but it needs to come further, and also with the private sector too and provide information that is both current and useful to them that is in some sense simplified and easier to manage.

Fourth, all of the stake holders in transit security need to be conducting more training exercises to accustom rail and transit officials with the unique requirements of disaster prevention and response involving mass transit, particularly trains, so I hope TSA and FEMA will continue to expand these exercises and local authorities and state authorities included will become more proactive and ensure that employees at every level are involved.

And fifth, we've got to continue to work with passengers to make them full partners in securing our rail and transit systems. That includes educating them about the risks, reporting suspicious activity and how to respond should an attack occur.

We have the DHS's Transit Security Grant Program, through which approximately \$1.8 billion in rail and transit grant funds have been distributed since 2006. These funds are really critically important to our state and local authorities, and that's why I feel that the house action to zero these funds out is just plain bad policy and I hope we will be able to overturn that here in the senate. I do want to stress that our law enforcement and intelligence agencies have successfully thwarted plots against rail and transit systems and in talking about what more we can do, we cannot move forward without acknowledging the remarkable work done in the 2009 plot by Najibullah Zazi to explode suicide bombs in the New York subway system was disrupted by brilliant intelligence and law enforcement work. A threat to the D.C. metro system last year was similarly uncovered and stopped before anyone was hurt. So these are the subjects I want to take to our witnesses. We really have the best in the field before us in the three businesses and I thank them for their commitment to strengthening the security of our rails and mass transit systems and to being with us today.

Senator Collins?