

Chief Frazier's Testimony
Senate Government Affairs Committee
12/13/01

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the invitation to join you here today for this very important discussion.

I am the Senior Vice President of System Security and Safety for Amtrak's national network. I am also Chief of the Amtrak Police Department -- a nationally accredited police force of 350 officers whose role is to protect Amtrak's customers, employees and property. We have taken the lead in assessing Amtrak's security procedures both before and after the tragedy of September 11.

It is not a cliché to say that the world around us changed in an instant on September 11. Today I want to describe our response to the terrorist attacks that claimed some 4,000 American lives. I've divided my presentation into three parts: Our immediate response to the attack, our intermediate response, and our long-range plan.

Amtrak has been operating on maximum alert since September 11. Within moments of the attacks, we suspended all Amtrak service nationwide to allow for a top-to-bottom security sweep. All trains, tracks, bridges, tunnels, stations and other facilities -- including those controlled by others -- were inspected within hours, and security personnel remain stationed at all facilities 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Amtrak was able to resume operations within a few hours -- gradually increasing the number of trains until a full operating schedule was achieved later that evening. For three days, when not a single commercial airliner was operating in the United States, Amtrak kept business people moving and brought stranded family members home.

In the weeks following the attack, Amtrak took a number of intermediate steps to increase our security:

We implemented a new policy requiring Amtrak guests to present valid photo IDs and answer security questions when purchasing tickets or checking baggage.

We have created a computer program that automatically cross-checks ticket purchases and reservations -- whether they are made at a ticket counter, a QuikTrak machine or online -- against the FBI watchlist on a real-time basis.

We have suspended on-board ticket sales in the Northeast Corridor between Washington, New York and Boston -- which means that every guest that boards a Northeast Corridor train will have been reviewed for security purposes.

In addition, we have restricted access to our locomotives, conducted emergency drills to deal with a range of contingencies, conducted baggage inspections, revised our System Security Plan and strengthened our partnerships with law enforcement agencies at all levels.

Looking ahead, we are committed to doing everything necessary and reasonable to improve our security further. Amtrak has created an internal task force with representatives from our police, operations, safety and engineering departments. The strategic goals of this task force are, first of all, to prevent terrorist attacks from happening, and second, to be prepared for emergencies should they occur. Our counter-terrorism plan is built around the three pillars of Deterrence, Vulnerability Reduction, and Emergency Preparedness.

To deter attacks on our guests, and reduce the vulnerability of our facilities and infrastructure, we are increasing our police patrols, deploying K-9 teams at major stations, training and educating our 24,000 Amtrak employees to be more aware of potential threats, conducting increased train and baggage room sweeps, securing our sites through lighting and barrier protections, and installing security cameras, access control systems, and hazmat detection and response systems. Moreover, it is important to remember that of the 22,000 miles of track over which Amtrak operates, we only own 685 miles. The remaining tracks we operate on are owned by the freight railroads, and we are working closely with the Association of American Railroads' task forces on physical infrastructure, operational security and information security. We are also cooperating closely with the American Public Transportation Association, and with our commuter and transit agency partners.

In the event that an act of terrorism does occur, Amtrak must be ready to deploy its team of emergency responders, who are continually drilled to handle crisis situations. But the real focus here is the fire department, police department and emergency management agencies of the community where the incident takes place. Amtrak has a program of reaching out to local emergency responders to increase their familiarity not just with Amtrak equipment, but with the railroad operating environment as a whole. Responding to an emergency situation should not have to entail guess work about the environment you are in, and responders should not be exposing themselves to any type of additional risk by virtue of being on the railroad.

Mitigating the potential ongoing effect of an incident is just as critical an element of preparedness as responding to the actual incident. Business continuity – rerouting trains, providing for alternative travel arrangements, accommodating passengers and so forth – requires foresight and planning, and should be a substantial part of any preparedness plan. As the passenger rail industry has grown to emphasize intermodalism, Amtrak’s operations have become even more intertwined with those of the commuter railroads, airport authorities, bus terminals and the like. The complexity of operating a system that carried 23.5 million riders this past Fiscal Year alone, while simultaneously responding to a crisis, can be a daunting task without a well thought out plan. Amtrak is constantly assessing how to keep our system running at as close to full capacity as possible while working through and recovering from potential terrorist incidents.

Mr. Chairman, since September 11, Amtrak has spent an additional \$12 million on security, over and above our projected levels. Since Congress has not provided us with any security relief, we have had to draw on our operating funds. Maintaining this rate of spending – which is essentially an unfunded mandate – means that Amtrak will have over \$50 million in additional expenses annually. Moreover, by their very nature, these expenses are somewhat unpredictable, since we must respond with the appropriate counter-measures based on the current level of threat assessment – yet we cannot forecast levels of threat accurately in the midst of a war.

Precisely because we truly are at war, it is important that we enhance security for ALL modes of transportation along parallel tracks. You cannot address the security needs of the airlines in isolation, because by doing so you only make it more likely that some other transportation mode – such as rail -- will be targeted. Addressing airline needs alone does not necessarily increase our vulnerability, but it most surely does highlight rail as a target.

Mr. Chairman, in response to Congressional requests, we have submitted a \$3.2 billion September 11 Response Package, which was broad and practical in its assessment. The \$3.2 billion breaks down into a few key elements:

\$949 million is needed to enhance, and in some places rebuild, the infrastructure of the Northeast Corridor. Americans simply will not be relying on the air shuttles the way they used to. If our economy is going to get started again, we’ll need faster and more reliable trains and facilities. The \$949 million will be used to increase reliability up to 20% and reduce travel times between Washington and Boston.

But we see this need for increased capacity across the rest of the country as well, which is why another \$600 million is needed to do things as basic as buy new equipment and upgrade existing inventory.

An additional \$1.5 billion would be devoted to bringing railroad tunnels in the New York, Washington and Baltimore regions up to modern standards for fire- and life-safety protection.

And \$515 million is needed to accomplish the deterrence, vulnerability reduction and emergency response efforts that I have already described.

Mr. Chairman, it is imperative that Congress act swiftly on funding rail security.

Mr. Chairman, before closing I would like to point out that while Amtrak has a good record on safety and security, we also face unique challenges. The foremost challenge is the relatively open and intermodal nature of our passenger rail system. For example, on an average weekday, New York's Penn Station handles about 30,000 Amtrak passengers a day. But at least 300,000 additional passengers go through the station on the Long Island Railroad and New Jersey Transit. Thousands more use the station to transfer to New York City subways.

And Penn Station is not unique. For more than 20 years, transportation policy has encouraged an open, intermodal environment in virtually every train station in the country.

In the light of September 11th, we at Amtrak are not about to abandon our historic commitment to an open passenger rail system. Rather, our goal is to strike the right balance between providing greater safety and security, on the one hand, and maintaining the kind of open, intermodal design that underpins virtually every rail system in the world, on the other. I believe that the policies I have just described achieve that delicate but all-important balance.

Thank you once again, Mr. Chairman, for inviting me to testify here today. I will be happy to answer your questions.