

BEFORE THE UNITED STATES SENATE
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

RIDING THE RAILS
How Secure is our Passenger and Transit Infrastructure?

TESTIMONY OF
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THURSDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2001
AT
9:00 A.M. ROOM 342
OF THE
DIRKSEN SENATE OFFICE BUILDING

Good Morning, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member and distinguished members of the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs. My name is Jeff Warsh. I am the Executive Director of New Jersey Transit, the nation's third largest transit agency and the largest statewide transit provider. I want to thank this committee for all your efforts to address transit and rail security issues. I also want to thank and commend Federal Transit Administrator Dorn and Secretary of Transportation Mineta for their efforts in securing our transportation networks.

NJ TRANSIT is responsible for the security of more than 223 million riders who use our system each year. Since September 11th, the dynamics of keeping our passengers safe and secure have changed dramatically. Not only has the threat we are facing changed, the actual nature of the commute in and around New York City had been transformed by the terrorist attacks of three months ago. NJ TRANSIT was dramatically impacted by these events because approximately 40% of our NJ TRANSIT riders are destined for New York City.

In the immediate aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Center, NJ TRANSIT worked hand-in-glove with Amtrak to increase security. Amtrak halted trans-Hudson Tunnel rail traffic and searched and secured the Hudson River Rail tunnels before reopening them later on the 11th. Select train stations were evacuated and secured before reopening. Parking lots below train tracks were cleared of cars. Roads in close proximity to certain train stations were, and still remain, blocked to automobile traffic. Amtrak placed guards proximate to the Northeast Corridor tunnels and bridges. Amtrak and NJ TRANSIT police have increased patrols with NJ TRANSIT police working 12-hour shifts. NJ TRANSIT distributed a list of major facilities to local police departments to enlist their help in critical asset protection.

NJ TRANSIT also implemented additional security measures. We contracted with local police departments to supplement our own force. We saw great increases in the number of bomb threats and anthrax scares, all of which proved to be unfounded, but still put strains on our police force.

The closure of the PATH tunnels and the imposition of a single-occupancy vehicle ban on Hudson River crossings has meant that many former PATH and automobile commuters are now using NJ TRANSIT service through Amtrak's North River Tunnels. September 11th shifted 60% of the jobs from lower Manhattan to Midtown, which is served by New York Penn Station. In addition, many commuters destined for lower Manhattan are now taking our train service to Penn Station and transferring to the New York City Subway system to lower Manhattan. With Amtrak's assistance, NJ TRANSIT has added two trains to Manhattan and has increased the number of cars on other trains to the maximum number that the platform in New York Penn Station will allow. We have also accelerated the

opening of a section of a new concourse at New York Penn Station to deal with the crush loads on the platforms. With all of these commuting changes, approximately 100,000 riders now take either NJ TRANSIT or Amtrak trains from New Jersey to New York City every day. We have seen close to a 50% increase in riders on our Northeast Corridor service through the Amtrak tunnels to New York's Penn Station.

This commuting pattern shift only serves to underscore the importance of increased life safety measures in those tunnels. The Congress has expressed its concern regarding Amtrak tunnel life safety in and around New York City. The North River Tunnels are approaching 100 years of age. Evacuation routes, fire retardation and ventilation systems in the tunnels must be significantly improved. I am here today to add New Jersey's voice to the chorus. Funding for these improvements is critical. I was pleased to see \$100 million appropriated in the Senate's Defense Appropriation bill for North River Tunnel life safety issues. These improvements are more important to NJ TRANSIT than to Amtrak as 75 out of every 100 trains that pass through the North River Tunnels are NJ TRANSIT trains. Amtrak needs more funding to make those improvements now more than ever.

Beyond improving life safety and security of the Hudson River rail tunnels, NJ TRANSIT is concerned with the safety and security of our passengers system-wide. However, I caution this committee not to deal with rail and transit security in the same way as airline security. Rail and transit security should be viewed in context. A strong public transportation system is an integral part of the security of our cities because public transportation is essential to evacuating urban centers. On September 11th, public transportation systems in New York, New Jersey, Washington and throughout the country carried hundreds of thousands of passengers and walking wounded out of harm's way. At the same time, airports were shut down and highways were packed with congestion. In times of crisis, our transit systems serve as our cities' best emergency escape.

Public transportation is also a target. And because it is so vital to the evacuation of cities, it should be doubly protected. But the approach to security of trains and buses should be very different from those of airports and airlines. There is a huge difference between airport security and security on our rail lines. Airplanes are much more vulnerable to catastrophic loss than trains. A train cannot be used by a terrorist as a guided missile. Access to train stations and airports is also fundamentally different. Whereas an airport can restrict passengers to a set of checkpoints where security guards have the ability to check passengers and luggage, train stations are by their nature more open and free flowing. It is a different threat and requires a different approach to security.

NJ TRANSIT is currently completing a full and complete review of its security needs. This critical exercise began prior to September 11th and although that review is not complete, we can make some preliminary observations. Our first line of defense is our people. Our conductors, bus drivers, station managers and especially our transit police officers all play critical roles in keeping our passengers secure. Greater police presence not only helps deter terrorist activities, it helps us respond to emergencies. We already have National Guard troops at New York Penn Station to supplement police needs. But in the long term, we need more men and women on the beat. In addition, security cameras, bomb-sniffing dog teams, communication equipment and emergency response equipment are also needed. Certain facility improvements such as permanent security barricades will also make the job of protecting transit assets easier. Many of our personnel, both police and others, need additional training to help them better respond to threats such as biological weapons attacks. But for all the high-tech security wizardry, I cannot stress enough the importance of the men and women of our transit police departments. A security camera is useless unless there is someone to monitor it in the control room. They have made a heroic effort and we need to continue to support their efforts and increase their ranks.

There is another important reason to fully support transit and railroad police departments. Because of the nature of our transit infrastructure, transit and railroad police departments rely on the cooperation of local and state police departments. The better we train, equip and field our transit and railroad police departments, the better local police departments can help us protect the security of the public. We already have coordination mechanisms in place

among police agencies. Even before September 11th, we were conducting emergency response drills. The transit industry as a whole has been more conscious of the terrorist threat because we were a target before September 11th. What we need now is to reinforce the police agencies that represent the backbone of the coordinated response effort for transit emergencies, our transit and railroad police departments.

One place we can do better in coordinating among agencies is intelligence. We can only be effective if we have an idea of what's coming. We need to better coordinate our intelligence information sharing among state, local and federal agencies.

I realize that airline security has dominated the news and I commend this body for its efforts to secure our skies. But improved airline security is not enough. We should focus on transportation security as whole. In that context, the security of transit operations should take priority. We are an essential part of this nation's homeland security in that we provide the means of escape when other modes fail. I want to thank this committee, this Senate and this Congress for your efforts and I urge you to do all you can to help NJ TRANSIT and transit agencies throughout the nation to respond to and prepare for the security needs of our industry.