

After the London Attacks: What Lessons Have Been Learned to Secure U.S. Transit Systems?

Senator Joe Lieberman

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Thanks, Madam Chairman.

Thanks for your opening statement and thank you very much for convening this hearing.

This committee has been quite engaged as the oversight committee of FEMA and the Department of Homeland Security in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. In fact, tomorrow we're holding a markup -- I believe a first by a Senate committee -- to bring out emergency response legislation; that is, legislation that will assist the victims in the communities in the response and recovery to Hurricane Katrina.

So I appreciate your decision to go ahead with this hearing as scheduled. And I think it reflects our shared conclusion that our transit systems remain vulnerable to terrorist attack, and that the terrorists who struck us on 9/11 are not going to take a holiday or a grace period because we've been hit by Hurricane Katrina. They're out there and we have to do everything we can urgently to increase our homeland defense of targets that are vulnerable and may be, therefore, attractive to terrorists.

Many of us have been concerned, as your opening statement suggests, Madam Chairman, since 9/11, with the lack of an adequate response to the defense of our mass transit systems.

As you said, it was understandable, post-9/11, that we should focus first on aviation security, and quite appropriately so. But 9/11 was a tragic wake-up call that should challenge us to better defend, not just aviation, but other transit systems and other vulnerable parts of our society.

The numbers here cry out, just as you said. The number I have: More than 14 million Americans ride our mass transit systems everyday, as compared to 2 million people who fly on airplanes. That doesn't mean we shouldn't do everything we can aggressively to protect the 2 million. It just means that we better not forget the 14 million.

Perhaps this is too simple, but it is one measure as to how much money we've spent since 9/11 on aviation security on the one hand and mass transit security on the other. You'll get some debate about these numbers depending on how you calculate them, but there seems to be agreement that we've spent at least \$15 billion on aviation security since 9/11 and that we've spent only \$300 million on mass transit security.

That can't go on. We're inviting trouble if it does go on.

For about three years, some of us have been trying to get the administration to issue a national transit security plan.

Last year finally, in the intelligence reform legislation which came out of this committee -- adopted in December -- there was a legal requirement that it was due on April 1.

A lot of months went by, but finally, after April 1 -- a little more than a week ago -- the plan was issued and, as Senator Collins has said, it was classified, preventing many of the stakeholders in our mass transit system for whom the document was issued really - - so they could use it -- from being able to use it.

I'm pleased that the department -- hopefully, at least in part, in response to the request made by Senator Collins and me -- has now agreed to permit the stakeholders to view the strategy. But we are still unable to discuss the content of the document here today without restriction.

I do want to discuss, with Mr. Hawley particularly, the federal government's vision for transit security and transportation security, generally in a way that is constructive and meaningful without compromising any of the restrictions established by the department.

So I guess I'd say right here at the outset to you, Mr. Hawley -- and (inaudible) to any others, but it's really to you -- that if at any point during the hearing in response to a question I or any of the rest of us ask -- but I'll say it about myself -- you believe that a full answer would require you to discuss information that cannot be discussed publicly, then please indicate so and limit your answers to that which you can discuss publicly.

I will say, for my part, I've reviewed the strategy -- that I remained concerned that, within it, there is not an adequate sense of priorities about -- vulnerabilities are listed in different areas of mass transit, but there's not a sense that I got of priorities about which of those vulnerabilities are most significant and, therefore, which we should focus most resources on most quickly.

Secondly, I share with you a general reaction -- I want to ask you about it -- that the plan continues to reflect an encouraging proactive, aggressive, creative, comprehensive kind of can-do, must-do attitude toward aviation security, but it does not do the same with regard to mass transit.

We understand, as Senator Collins said, that a lot of forms of mass transit are more open systems, harder to protect. But that's not a reason not to do a lot of things that are not being done now to push -- if I can use an old metaphor -- the security envelope here -- it's probably not the appropriate one -- to make sure we're doing everything we can, even allowing for the openness of the systems.

In that sense, our witnesses today, I think, can be extremely helpful. And I'm very grateful that they're here.

Chief Brown -- Michael Brown -- comes with the experience, not just of the tragedy of the attacks in London in July, but of all that the London system does to deter such attacks well beyond what is done in most of our transit systems today.

Mr. Ron brings considerable experience from Israel -- unfortunately, having lived with the clear and present, constant danger of terrorist attack -- in other methods that can be used to deter those attacks in open mass transit systems. I look forward to hearing him.

And then Chief Hanson from the Metro Police Department is, in some sense, the consumer and the front-line first preventer, not to mention, first responder, in mass transit security and I want to ask her about how she thinks we, at the federal government, are doing in helping her do her job.

Bottom line, I have a -- and I know everybody on the committee does -- has a real sense of urgency about doing a lot better than we've done yet in protecting the American people when they ride mass transit in this country. And I'm confident that, from this hearing, will come some good ideas that we can use together to accomplish that very important national security goal.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.