

Statement of Ranking Member Jackie Speier (D-CA)
Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence
Committee on Homeland Security

Subcommittee Markup Session

November 15, 2011

I am pleased that we are meeting to consider two targeted and bipartisan bills that seek to prevent a high-consequence terrorist attack on U.S. soil. To date, America has been fortunate to have not experienced the death and destruction associated with a ‘dirty bomb’ or a mass transit attack.

That is not to say we have not had close calls. In fact, in October 2010, the FBI arrested a man who was plotting to launch a large-scale attack on commuters in the Washington, D.C. Metro system. This spring he was sentenced to 23 years in prison.

More recently, we learned from documents taken from the compound of Osama bin Laden – following the successful Navy SEALs raid – that al Qaeda was plotting to attack U.S. mass transit systems to commemorate the 10th anniversary of 9/11.

As for a ‘dirty bomb’ or WMD attack, the threat of a terrorist accessing loose nuclear materials from the former Soviet Union or weaponizing biological agents that were taken from stockpiles of now-toppled authoritarian regimes is of major concern.

My bill that we are considering today, H.R. 3140, the “Mass Transit Intelligence Prioritization Act” would help address these concerns by directing the Secretary of Homeland Security to prioritize the assignment of intelligence officers and analysts, *including those from TSA*, to State and urban area fusion centers located in high-risk jurisdictions with mass transit systems.

This bill further requires that the officers assigned to these fusion centers have, as a primary responsibility, the creation of mass transit intelligence products. These products are essential to help State, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies carry out their homeland security responsibilities.

They are even more critical in these tough budgetary times when state and local authorities are struggling with deep budget cuts and reduced staffing to fulfill their mandates.

These new products will complement the public “see something say something” campaign. An alert public that “says something” when they “see something”, together with a well-informed local law enforcement is critical to intercepting and thwarting an attack.

Such a partnership between DHS analysts and local law enforcement can enhance situational awareness with respect to the threat of terrorism to the millions of Americans who rely on mass transit systems, including the threat of an attack involving a weapon of mass destruction.

On the subject of weapons of mass destruction, I fully support the other bill under consideration today—H.R. 2764, the “WMD Intelligence and Information Sharing Act of 2011.”

As introduced by Chairman Meehan, this bill would strengthen information sharing at all levels of government with regard to threats involving chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear materials. Common to both bills is an underlying belief that information sharing is at the core of terrorism prevention.