

**Mike Mollahan, Legislative Director/Trustee, Port Authority Police Benevolent Association
House Homeland Security Subcommittee on Transportation Security Hearing on Tuesday
June 21, 2016**

**“Protecting our Passengers: Perspectives on Securing Surface Transportation in New
Jersey and New York”**

Chairman Donovan, Ranking Member Payne and members of the subcommittee, thank you for convening this important hearing and giving me the opportunity to appear before you today.

My name is Mike Mollahan and I am legislative director and a trustee of the Port Authority Police Benevolent Association (PBA). Our police officers patrol some of the most terrorist-targeted infrastructure and landmarks in the world, including the six bridges and tunnels between New Jersey and New York; the world’s busiest airport system of JFK, LaGuardia and Newark airports; marine terminals and ports including Port Newark/Elizabeth and Brooklyn Piers; the largest and busiest bus terminal in the nation, the Port Authority Bus Terminal in Manhattan; the sacred ground of the World Trade Center; and most relevant to this hearing, the PATH trains.

The PATH heavy rail rapid transit system serves as the primary transit link between Manhattan and neighboring New Jersey urban communities and suburban commuter railroads. PATH carries approximately 244,000 passengers each weekday and is growing; in 2015, PATH carried approximately 76.6 million passengers. I have worked the PATH system for the last twelve years and during this time, passenger loads have increased, trains have become more crowded and threat incidents have risen.

For today’s hearing, I would like to highlight two areas that are important to fortifying the security of PATH trains: training and resources for police officers and coordination with other agencies.

Training and Resources

Over the past three years, biannual training, which involves active shooter and tactical weapons training, pistol re-qualification, legal updates, and a host of other important refresher training, has gone down from five days of training to two days of training which directly impacts officer readiness.

In particular, active shooter and tactical weapons training previously entailed a full day of training but has been cut to only a few hours. Tactical training involves using specialized weapons and equipment to breach doors and “tac house” structures that are built to simulate rooms within buildings or train cars and mimic active shooter and mass shooting situations. This type of training is more important than ever in the aftermath of assault weapons attacks in Newtown, CT and Aurora, CO, as well as the recent shootings in Orlando, FL, and San Bernadino, CA, which have now become all too frequent.

To this end, “heavy weapons” and “heavy weapons trained” officers need to be increased throughout the Port Authority facilities. At PATH we have four MP5 submachine guns and three AR-15 rifles. In a command that encompasses six cities spanning two states, these are dangerously low numbers. Compounding this issue is the fact that many of our

vehicles are not equipped with the proper racks to secure these weapons, thus further limiting the number of patrol vehicles and officers that can carry these weapons.

Furthermore, the support services provided to our patrol units, including the Emergency Service Unit (ESU) and K9 Unit, have been drastically diminished.

The ESU provides SWAT, sniper and specialized response capabilities to issues that arise at all Port Authority facilities. On most days there is only one ESU emergency truck staffed with just two officers to respond to incidents at Port Authority facilities for the entire state of New Jersey. Thus, if there is an active shooter situation at a New Jersey PATH station requiring a SWAT response, there are only two Port Authority ESU officers in the state to respond. ESU staffing levels have also been cut for budget savings and current ESU officers are not given adequate refresher training.

The Port Authority K9 unit, which covers PATH, the Bus Terminal and the World Trade Center, has gone down from five explosive detection canines to three canines. Due to the staffing of canine shifts, at times there is only one explosive detection team working the entire PATH system and all other Port Authority facilities, excluding the airports. This leaves the traveling public exposed to unattended bags and potential explosives, creating unnecessary danger and delay in response.

Lastly, while the camera systems at PATH have been updated, they lack enhancement, or zoom/focus, capability which can make identifying and apprehending suspects difficult. The cameras at the Port Authority bridges, tunnels and Bus Terminal are also outdated when compared to readily available and common technology on the market. For example, at the George Washington Bridge—the world’s busiest bridge—the cameras, which are over eight years old, cannot show who jumped off or abandoned a vehicle on the bridge. On October 3, 2008, our officers were unable to tell who glued suspicious bottles to the Lincoln Tunnel approach over a seven week period. However, nothing has been done to remedy the camera situation at the bridges. More recently, on April 2, 2016, officers were forced to close the nation’s busiest bus terminal for several hours after someone intentionally left a cigar box in a suspicious manner and we were unable to observe the suspect or suspects. This was due to the fact that the cameras at the bus station are not recording 24/7, in real time—recording must be manually initiated. The bus terminal cameras have also not been updated in over 8 years. With today’s technological advancements, the Port Authority Police should have been able to have a photo of the suspect within minutes to be able to broadcast it to all PAPD, NYPD and MTA PD in proximity to the bus terminal. It is worth nothing that the Port Authority has installed state-of-the-art cameras on the JFK Air Train and should deploy this camera technology to the rest of its facilities. We are still unsure if these incidents were pranks or tests of vulnerability by terrorists. Either way this is unacceptable.

Interagency Coordination

The Port Authority Police attend New Jersey Transit Police Transit Tools and Tactics Training which is a step in the right direction. However, the Port Authority needs to expand this training to more officers, or similar training with other departments, to ensure

a seamless multiagency response to incidents. Further, when we train in multiagency drills, the Port Authority staffs the drills at significantly higher levels than we staff on a daily basis, making the drills less realistic. Thus, multiagency drills should be conducted with the regular number of officers assigned during the shift time for the drill.

With regards to interagency communication, the PBA, along with the Jersey City Office of Emergency Management, has made numerous requests to the Port Authority to install a Mutual Link Radio System which allows multiagency communications during emergencies. While the system has been installed at the PATH Police Desk, our officers are not trained on how to use this capability. Training on this system should be made available to officers immediately so that in the event of a multi-agency response, our officers are able to relay information to mutual aid forces in order for a seamless and unified response. Mutual Link is a good communication system that needs to be placed at all Port Authority facilities and we need to be trained in how to use it.

Those seeking to disrupt travel and inflict harm are constantly working to identify and exploit vulnerabilities in our system, so we must remain vigilant and aggressive in our posture. Our officers also patrol the World Trade Center where we witnessed the worst terrorist attack in American history, and I know that the men and women who patrol and secure this area never want to let another tragedy like this happen on our watch. In this regard, the most important actions that can be taken to help secure PATH are to increase officer training and resources and to continue and enhance interagency coordination among the various first responder entities within our region.

I would request that members of this committee join me on a visit to the PATH facilities, and other important Port Authority infrastructure, to inspect these issues firsthand and see what needs to be done immediately to address these concerns and properly protect the public.

Thank you again for inviting me to appear before your subcommittee and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.