

Ranking Member Donald Payne Jr. (D-NJ) Opening Statement

Field hearing: Protecting our Passengers: *Perspectives on Securing Surface Transportation in New Jersey and New York*

Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response & Communications Committee on Homeland Security

New Jersey City University, Jersey City, New Jersey

Tuesday, June 21, 2016

Our region is a national transportation hub with diverse assets – from rail, to bus, to ferries.

And our transit operators, first responders, and workers are uniquely positioned to tell us what the Federal government does well to keep our systems secure and what it can do better.

In light of the number of transportation systems running through this area, people here are especially qualified to share perspectives on coordination among transit operators and with emergency responders.

Since I joined the Committee on Homeland Security in 2013, I have focused my efforts on making sure people are safe in the places they should be safe – whether it is at a school, a night club, a sporting event, or on a train, getting to work.

Two-years ago, I hosted a hearing in Newark on securing mass gatherings, using New Jersey’s impressive preparations for the 2014 Super Bowl as a case study.

New Jersey had important best practices to share.

I am proud that the rest of the country was able to benefit from New Jersey’s expertise in making a “soft target” safer.

Nevertheless, there are still people - whatever their motivations - who want to exploit soft targets in our communities.

The tragic events in Orlando are evidence of that. I, again, want to express my deepest condolences to the families and loved ones of the victims.

The terrorist attacks in Belgium earlier this year also underscore the threats to soft targets.

On March 22, the world was devastated when terrorists carried out three coordinated attacks at transportation facilities in Brussels.

As I was in Washington getting briefed on the attacks, I couldn't help but think of my district, and my constituents.

Every day, thousands of my constituents board trains to get to work or visit somewhere along the Northeast Corridor, whether it's Jersey Transit, PATH, the subway, or Amtrak.

When I saw footage of the devastation in Brussels, I couldn't help but ask myself, "How do we make sure nothing like that happens here?" and "How do we make sure that our first responders are prepared to respond if it does?"

Congress took important steps to prevent attacks on our surface transportation systems nearly ten years ago when it passed the 9/11 Act.

It required the Transportation Security Administration to issue regulations to secure high-risk transit systems and improve training for frontline employees.

I am troubled that TSA is almost a decade behind in issuing these regulations, and want to know why they have been held up and when we can expect them.

Additionally, I am interested to learn how TSA coordinates with transit operators to improve security in the absence of the required regulations.

Today, we also have a distinguished panel of emergency responders who have spent well over a decade building robust capabilities to respond to the full spectrum of events – from manmade and natural disasters to mass transit incidents.

The 9/11 attacks revealed significant gaps in national response capabilities and the need for improved coordination among first responders and local stakeholders.

The remarkable progress this region has made is due, in large part, to significant Federal homeland security grant funding.

Today, we will have the opportunity to learn how grant investments have made us safer, and what more the Federal government needs to do.