

NEWS ALERT



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Homeland Security Committee

Rep. Bennie G. Thompson, Chairman



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson

“Rail and Mass Transit Security: Industry and Labor Perspectives”

February 13, 2007 (WASHINGTON) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Transportation Security and Infrastructure Protection Subcommittee Hearing entitled “Rail and Mass Transit Security: Industry and Labor Perspectives”:

“Like all Americans, I am alarmed at the lack of security for rail and public transportation systems around the country. Each weekday, 11.3 million passengers in 35 metropolitan areas and 22 states use commuter, heavy, or light rail.

History has shown that terrorists view rail and public transportation systems as potential targets. Almost three years ago, terrorist bombs exploded on Madrid’s rail system, killing and maiming hundreds of innocent civilians. This coming July marks the second anniversary of the terrorist bombings throughout London’s Underground Tube system and aboard London Transit Buses. Last summer, a number of bombs tore through Mumbai’s rail system, in the worst attack we’ve seen on a public transportation system.

Our enemies around the world have proved that they can and will kill hundreds and injure hundreds more by means of terrorism.

According to a RAND Corporation database of worldwide terrorist incidents, between 1995 and June 2005, there were over 250 terrorist attacks worldwide against rail targets, resulting in almost 900 deaths and over 6,000 injuries. These numbers do not include those killed and injured in the London and Mumbai attacks in 2005 and 2006.

Despite all of these attacks, rail and public transportation security remains secondary to aviation. TSA’s entire surface transportation budget is less than 1% of the amount the President requested for aviation security. In the Administration’s FY08 budget request, aviation security gets nearly \$5 billion, where surface transportation security gets only \$41.4 million.

Labor organizations say that their members are not being given the training to respond to acts of terrorism. The industry claims that it is doing enough but the frontline rail workers strongly disagree. Chris Kozub from the National Transit Institute (NTI) has testified before our Committee on training for mass transit employees. In his testimony, he stated that NTI and FTA's training had reached about 20% of the transit employee workforce which is approximated to be about 300,000.

As of today that number has increased to slightly higher than 30%. While reaching 90,000 employees – many of whom are employed by the larger, security critical, metropolitan systems of the country – is a noteworthy accomplishment, NTI is still below the halfway point and has a lot of work still to do.

Should it be left up to industry to decide how much training is enough? Shouldn't training for our frontline workers be mandatory, and ongoing?

The federal government should provide more guidance for mandatory training and continuing education programs for frontline workers.

In the Teamsters Rail Conference Report "High Alert: Workers Warn of Security Gaps on Nation's Railroads," rail workers report having to work long hours without rest and without much support. The workers surveyed cited irregular work schedules and lack of rail police and personnel make security at our rail yards impossible. Further, the report revealed that workers surveyed reported equipment and hazmat unattended and unsecured.

This is unreasonable. It's as though we are all waiting for the worst case scenario before we take action.

To protect the country, my colleagues and I will be introducing legislation this Congress, mandating that the Administration take concrete steps to improve the nation's rail and public transportation system. The American people deserve no less."

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