

CITY OF NEW ORLEANS

C. RAY NAGIN
MAYOR

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DIRECTOR

February 7, 2008

Madame Chair and Committee Members. I thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructures' Subcommittee on railroads, pipelines, and hazardous material.

I am Colonel Terry J. Ebbert, The Director of Homeland Security for the city of New Orleans and am responsible for Police, Fire, Emergency Medical Services, Criminal Justice and the Office of Emergency preparedness. I have served in this position for the past five years.

The City of New Orleans, like all of our large urban areas, has great public safety planning and operational challenges. We at the local level have limited resources available to deal with catastrophic incidents. Our planning is based on our capabilities and the requesting of additional state and federal resources. Transportation evacuation planning was, and continues to be, of great concern to me and my departments.

New Orleans is the only major urban area in the United States that has no authorized federal or Red Cross support for "Sheltering in Place" during major hurricanes. This situation requires multi state and Parrish planning for mandatory general population evacuation. As you are aware "mandatory" is not "forced" evacuation. My police officers will not breakdown doors and remove citizens from their homes by force. We must create a plan that the citizens believe will work to ensure their cooperation. Several major milestones must be completed to successfully evacuate 1.3 million people from South East Louisiana. :

1. A coordinated regional plan for self evacuation
2. A City Assisted Evacuation Plan to move 25,000 citizens without personal transportation

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3. A sheltering plan that supports both evacuation plans
4. A public education plan that convinces all citizens that it is their best interest to work with Public Government and plan to evacuate.

To accomplish these very difficult goals requires close coordination of planning at every level of government that utilizes all available resources to the maximum capability. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina we were criticized for not utilizing rail transportation. I tell you, as I did both the House and Senate Investigative committees that the non use was not a result of not attempting to plan for their utilization. The problem remained that we were a local agency, with no capability to coordinate a memorandum of understanding with federally subsidized AMTRAK.

During the past two and a half years I have continued to work closely with my state and federal partners to ensure that we could utilize rail transportation to move a major portion of our most fragile elderly and young citizens. During the past two years hundreds of planning hours have been dedicated to this effort and we have been able to successfully obtain dedicated rail resources for 2006 and 2007. These two plans were completely different and we are getting ready to start the process from scratch for the third time. This is a very difficult process that should not need to be repeated every year.

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The question that keeps reoccurring to me is, “Where is the National Rail Transportation Plan”?

The National Rail Plan should be developed, on a regional basis, to enable all urban areas to take advantage of railroads in evacuation planning. Leaving rail on the sideline, or with only limited capability, and moving large numbers of citizens by commercial and military air appears to be a large waste of taxpayers’ money. Federal contracting of commercial buses, to be placed on-call and moved into evacuation areas prior to a storm, is problematic due to traffic and availability.

Trains are mobile and plans can be developed to move assets to any area requiring assistance.

Trains are unaffected by vehicle traffic congestion. Trains are the safest and most comfortable mode of transportation to move elderly and those with minor medical problems. Moving large numbers of people by train makes operational and fiscal sense. Pre designated shelters,

supported by rail transportation moving over unrestricted passenger and freight lines, is a safe, affordable and dependable means of evacuation. I believe it is unrealistic to expect South East Louisiana to successfully evacuate 1.3 million people, in a limited 48 hour window, without

extensive support of rail capability. To accomplish this task, emergency rail assets must be made available to all local urban areas. To do this we need a National Framework to make it happen. Those of us at the local level look to your assistance at making this happen!

Thank you for your support in examining the increased capability of railroad evacuation operations. I will be happy to take your questions.