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Before The

House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings and Emergency Planning

Disaster Capacity in the National Capital Region: Experiences, Capabilities and Weaknesses

April 3, 2009

Good morning and thank you, Chairwoman Norton, for inviting me to testify on behalf of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA). I am Jeff Delinksi, Deputy Chief of the Special Operations Bureau for the Metro Transit Police Department, and I welcome the opportunity to address the Committee's theme of Disaster Capacity in the National Capital Region, and specifically the critical role that WMATA plays in the region's preparedness and response to emergencies.

Background

As you well know, WMATA was created in 1967 from an interstate compact to plan, develop, build, finance, and operate a balanced regional transportation system in the National Capital area and has been operating both bus and rail transit since 1976. The transit system has grown to encompass 106 miles of track running through 86 rail stations, 332 current bus routes servicing over 14,000 bus stops, and is supported by dozens of transit facilities. This makes WMATA the second largest subway system and seventh largest bus system in the nation. In short, WMATA is a far-reaching system servicing 3.5 million people living in an area roughly the size of Rhode Island. We operate in the District of Columbia, the State of Maryland, and the Commonwealth of Virginia, in five counties and three cities.

We provide on average over 1.2 million rides on weekdays transporting tourists, local residents, and commuters, making WMATA an important contributor to the health and vitality of the regional economy. The Metro Transit Police Department (MTPD) is responsible for a variety of law enforcement and public safety functions in transit facilities throughout the Washington, DC metropolitan area. Existing as the first and only tri-jurisdictional police agency in the country, the MTPD has 423 sworn officers, 106 security special police, and 24 civilian personnel. Day in and day out, MTPD is focused on supporting WMATA's goal to provide the "Best Ride in the Nation."

The geographic location and role of the District of Columbia as the nation's capital present a number of vulnerabilities and hazards for the region. It is unfortunate, but inevitable, that unexpected incidents can and do happen in a community of this size. Since the inception of WMATA, safety has remained our primary focus coupled with quick response and resolution of emergencies. Whether a small Metro-specific incident or a regional emergency, our first priority is keeping our passengers, employees, and the

public safe. As has become routine, WMATA will respond to incidents and emergencies in partnership with our local first responders to protect lives, preserve property, and restore service.

WMATA Emergency Management History

In 1995, the sarin chemical attacks in the Tokyo Subway served as a wakeup call for transit police departments around the world. More recent attacks on mass transit systems, as seen in Israel, Madrid, London, and Mumbai, further demonstrate the need for effective transit emergency management. Although our rail and bus systems have not experienced these types of attacks, WMATA remains alert and aware of the threat of terrorism. In 2008, the Metro Transit Police Department (MTPD) investigated 224 suspicious packages and people, 9 unknown substances, and received 20 bomb threats to our facilities. We are vigilant; yet a terrorist attack could occur. Moreover, the 1992 Los Angeles riots, the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, and even the recent floods in North Dakota emphasize the support and resources mass transit systems can contribute during natural disasters and non-terrorist related emergencies. Not only are transit systems critical for moving people away from potential terrorist threats and natural hazards, they may also provide temporary sheltering, traffic routing and control, as well as movement of emergency supplies, personnel, and equipment.

WMATA has a history of providing emergency response training and outreach to our regional public safety partners. WMATA opened the Emergency Response Training Facility in 2002, a first of its kind facility in the United States dedicated to transit. It is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to provide the knowledge and skills necessary for first responders, including military, law enforcement, fire, emergency medical service personnel, and WMATA employees to respond to a transit emergency. The facility includes a 260-foot tunnel, two Metrorail cars, and a simulated electrified third rail for mock fire and rescue exercises. The tunnel is used for terrorism, disaster, and tactical response drills. The facility also houses the nation's first passenger rail emergency evacuation simulator. The emergency evacuation simulator can roll a passenger commuter rail car 180 degrees (upside down) in 10 degree increments, simulating railcar positions after derailments or other rail incidents. WMATA has used the "rollover rig" to train fire, police, and other first responders on the complications

associated with rescuing people from a rail car that has rolled over on its side or even upside down. Since its opening, more than 15,000 people have been trained at this facility, which has earned a national reputation.

In 2004, Metro Transit Police launched a training initiative entitled "Managing Metro Emergencies." The training was devised and developed in response to the Madrid bombings in addition to a recent series of service disruptions that forced thousands of customers to evacuate the Metrorail system. During a two year period, the "Managing Metro Emergencies" course provided over 5000 regional law enforcement, fire and rescue, department of transportation, and WMATA personnel enhanced training for mitigating, evacuating, transporting, and recovering from a major service disruption in our system. The course put particular emphasis on enhancing the management of pedestrian and vehicle traffic when forced to temporarily evacuate rail stations due to service disruptions. The course was so well-received by the region that Metro also offered an additional, more operational oriented course requested by the region's fire departments.

Emergency management staff has provided training and outreach to a variety of stakeholders, developed emergency response partnerships with local response agencies, and participated in a variety of programs designed to improve prevention and response to emergency incidents and planned events. Additionally, the emergency management staff is responsible for outfitting and maintaining Metro stations with equipment and tools that can save lives in the event of rail incidents or emergencies, including:

- Emergency Track Evacuation Carts and cabinets
- Automated External Defibrillators
- Emergency Medical Services cabinets
- Station fire maps

WMATA Emergency Management Present and Future

Emergency management is based on identifying gaps in training and response and developing strategies for meeting those needs. It is my pleasure to announce that WMATA has recently intensified its focus on emergency management activities by creating an Office of Emergency Management within the Metro Transit Police Department. In December of 2008, Mr. Peter LaPorte was hired to report directly to the Chief of Police as the Director of the Office of Emergency Management. Mr. LaPorte has over

20 years of experience in state- and local-level public safety, including serving as the Executive Director of the District of Columbia Emergency Management Agency from 1999 to 2003. He has coordinated nine Presidential-declared disasters including floods, blizzards, Hurricane Isabel, and the Washington District's response to the 9-11 events.

Since his first day he has been working to enhance both external and internal relationships and to build an emergency management staff. With the recommitment of six internal staff and the hiring of five personnel, Mr. LaPorte has created a team that has over 200 years of transit-based incident response and emergency management experience. With backgrounds encompassing fire services, law enforcement, HazMat response, emergency medical services, fire protection systems, emergency management, incident command, structural engineering, construction, radio communications, transit operations, and transportation planning, the emergency management staff has a range of skills that contribute to a well-rounded, knowledgeable team.

While the Office of Emergency Management will continue to conduct training and improve our response to incidents, it will also oversee a new training initiative involving the delivery of Incident Command System (ICS) Training to an estimated 8,000 WMATA employees. The training will be delivered at awareness, operational, and command levels. Funded through the Department of Homeland Security's Transit Security Grant Program (TSGP) and regional Urban Area Security Initiative funds, this program will raise awareness of security-related issues and instruct operational employees to implement the proper response procedures and command system structure during the initial and developing phases of a Metro-specific incident or emergency. This will allow WMATA to better manage resources and integrate with other local emergency response agencies. This same training is available for external public safety response agencies to prepare for incidents in the Metro system.

The emergency management staff has also committed to focusing attention on improving efforts for planning and recovery functions including:

- continually updating WMATA's Emergency Operations Plan
- procuring emergency equipment and technology to improve response time

- establishing methods for seeking reimbursement funds due to special events or emergencies
- documenting after action reports for significant events and emergencies

Above all, partnerships with first responders and regional stakeholders are the foundation of effective emergency management. WMATA would not be able to manage emergencies without capitalizing on the strengths of our partner agencies. Continuance of frequent training and exercises, as well as ongoing involvement with the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) are the primary ways for building and improving our relationships with external agencies and departments. One of the many committees that WMATA sits on within the Council of Governments includes the Emergency Manager's Committee which is composed of Emergency Management professionals from the COG member jurisdictions, the State of Maryland, the Commonwealth of Virginia, and Federal partners.

WMATA's Role in Special Event Planning

WMATA not only responds to emergency incidents, but is critically tied to the success of the numerous special events that take place in this region, such as the National Cherry Blossom Festival, Capitol Fourth of July celebrations, and designated National Security Special Events. The most recent of these large-scale National Security Special Events was the 2009 Presidential Inauguration which resulted in the largest crowd served in WMATA's history. With a great deal of planning, preparation, and coordination in concert with numerous other regional players, including the United States Secret Service serving as the lead agency, WMATA's goal was to provide service for all those choosing transit as their means of getting to and from the National Mall and other destinations on Inauguration Day. All of WMATA's internal activities would have proved pointless had we not coordinated with the region-wide Inauguration planning effort.

The success on Inauguration Day is proof of not only WMATA's ability to work within the region, but the region's propensity to work together. And although it is sometimes overlooked, it is during pre-planning for events such as the Presidential Inauguration that relationships and networks grow and strengthen. It is because of the ability for the region to work together, and in some cases thanks to volunteers that came from all parts of the

nation, that WMATA is able to boast that we provided safe transportation for over 1.5 million individual trips on both bus and rail on Inauguration Day.

WMATA Priorities and Capabilities during an Emergency

WMATA is a key player in responding to large-scale incidents or emergencies. When an unplanned incident does occur in the National Capital Region it is our responsibility to ensure customer safety, minimize the delay, and get people moving again. Our first priority is to our regular customers. Whether that means getting people home or simply moving them away from danger, if WMATA is able to function safely and in manner that puts no one at risk, we will be providing the best transit service available.

WMATA's actions on September 11, 2001 provide a good example of our ability to move large numbers of people during a regional emergency. On that day, WMATA's General Manager and Chief of Police determined that there were no credible threats against the Metro system and decided to keep the system open to assist in moving people out of harm's way and back home. Luckily, train operations were still working peak shifts and morning rush hour was extended to transport people back home. As a result, WMATA transported over 1 million people on bus and rail that day. If WMATA had shut down the system, these people would have been stranded in a city that was under attack. It takes equipment, personnel, and planning to keep buses on the road and trains in motion; any missing link can disrupt transit operations. Activating an aggressive transit emergency response takes all of the aforementioned components and, just as critical, substantial coordination with the region.

It must be said that while WMATA is willing and prepared to operate in less than ideal circumstances, we do have limits in our capacity to move passengers. Even in the best conditions, the region always faces traffic management challenges. WMATA in conjunction with its regional partners has been active in the development of the Metropolitan Area Transportation Operations Coordination (MATOC) program. MATOC is an area-wide situational awareness effort that enhances coordination between the region's transportation providers. It is currently being developed with funding provided by Congress and is set to go operational in July of this year. Through this and many other efforts, WMATA will continue to strengthen its partnerships and always try to be responsive to requests from our regional

partners for assistance during an emergency, taking into consideration these challenges and our priority commitment to our everyday customers.

WMATA and the National Capital Region are dedicated to improving our emergency management capabilities. Much of this progress is due to funds appropriated by the federal government to make emergency management a priority for the region. It would prove beneficial if the Department of Homeland Security and the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) specifically could provide more flexibility in the use of Transit Security Grant Program funds so that we can more adequately address our primary needs linked to emergency management and response. Thanks to your efforts and others in Congress, the overall funding level for the Transit Security Grant Program has increased significantly over the past two years – that's the good news. Unfortunately, the TSA does not deem as a priority spending funds on emergency management activities such as purchasing equipment to assist first responders, enhancing emergency communications, and procuring other tools critical for mitigating the impact of an emergency.

Conclusion

While WMATA and the region have done a great deal in readying for and responding to emergencies and planning for events, continuing to invest in emergency management initiatives such as proper equipment, training efforts, planning processes, response measures, recovery protocols, and overall prevention techniques is imperative for enhancing the National Capital Region's mobility, safety, and quality of life. The men and women of WMATA will continue to strengthen our capabilities and relationships with local, regional, and federal partners to ensure a safer, more secure, and better prepared region.