

Opening Statement

U.S. Senator Deb Fischer

January 23, 2018

Surface Transportation Subcommittee

“Surface Transportation Security: Addressing Current and Emerging Threats,”

Good afternoon.

I am pleased to convene the Senate Subcommittee on Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine Infrastructure, Safety, and Security for our first hearing of 2018 titled, “Surface Transportation Security: Addressing Current and Emerging Threats.”

I also want to welcome Senator Peters as the new ranking member of this subcommittee. I look forward to working with you.

We must ensure the security of all modes of transportation. This includes our roads, rail, ports, pipelines, and mass transit systems.

Several recent and tragic incidents have highlighted the need for greater attention to transportation security.

In 2016, Europe saw terrible attacks that targeted transportation systems. In Nice, France, a member of ISIL drove a commercial truck into a crowded promenade, killing 84 people. Similarly, in March of that year, 16 people were killed in Brussels, Belgium, when a bomb detonated at a metro station.

The United States is not immune to these kinds of attacks. On December 11, 2017, a man detonated an improvised explosive device in an underground subway terminal in New York City. Thankfully, there were no fatalities, though three people did sustain injuries. A similar event occurred in New York City’s Chelsea neighborhood in September 2016, when a terrorist used a bomb to injure 31 people near the town’s train station.

These incidents are not exclusive to urban areas either. Last October, an armed man was able to stop a California Zephyr Amtrak train near Oxford, Nebraska. He has since been charged with terrorism.

We must be constantly vigilant against threats to our country, including on our nation’s transportation system. Al Qaeda has reportedly issued instructions for attacking our railroads, calling them our “easiest targets.”¹ It’s clear that our ports, highways, pipelines, and railroads are at risk.

Today’s hearing will focus on examining our response to threats to our surface transportation system. How we respond is vital to the security of passengers, as well as our economic security.

The witnesses today oversee our transportation security system. On August 3, 2017, the Senate confirmed David Pekoske to be Administrator of the Transportation Security Administration. Administrator Pekoske previously served as Vice Commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard.

¹ Erin Dooley and David Kerley, “Terror Threat to US Rail Puts Law Enforcement on Alert,” ABC News: November 26, 2017: <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/terror-threat-us-rail-puts-law-enforcement-alert/story?id=51204458>.

We will also hear testimony from Department of Homeland Security Acting Inspector General John Kelly, who was appointed Deputy Inspector General in June 2016, and became Acting Inspector General in December 2017.

Thank you both for being here.

In examining our transportation system's security, we should examine the risks to our network, as well as the resources TSA has to address those risks and counter potential attacks.

The TSA does not directly manage surface transportation security the way it manages our airport security. Instead, TSA provides guidance, oversight, intelligence, and assistance to system operators and law enforcement as they work to secure our nation's surface transportation network. This role is critical to close the gaps in our transportation security.

The men and women of TSA perform a tremendous service for our country, working night and day to keep passengers and freight secure. We must ensure TSA has the tools it needs to carry out its mission.

This Congress, I was proud to cosponsor the Surface and Maritime Transportation Security Act, a comprehensive bill to address gaps in our surface transportation security. For example, in September 2016, the Department of Homeland Security Inspector General found that TSA lacked an, "intelligence-driven, risk-based security strategy."

Our bill would instruct TSA to implement a risk-based strategy so it can more quickly and completely respond to threats.

It expands canine explosive detection teams, authorizes computer-vetting systems for passenger railroads, and establishes a program to train surface transportation security operators and inspectors to identify and respond to threats.

Additionally, it reforms the credentialing process for Transportation Worker Identification Credential, or TWIC (pronounced *twick*) to ensure clarity with other credentialing programs.

We will also examine the types of threats that face our transportation system, what strategies and technology are available to address these threats, and how TSA works with industry to shore up our security.

I look forward to the testimony of our witnesses. I would now like to invite my colleague, Senator Peters, to offer his opening remarks.