

Transportation and Terrorism

Perhaps the biggest impact of the Sept. 11 attacks was made to the nation's transportation sector because of the "weapons" that were used to achieve the terrorists' objectives. It is not unusual for airlines to be targeted by terrorists, but it is not common for them to be used as the "weapon" of destruction. These events put the nation on alert, and transportation venues began to analyze and change their operations with the realization of their vulnerability.

Many changes have been made to ensure the safety of Americans as they travel throughout the country via planes, mass transit, trains and on the highways. This article will focus on air travel and mass transit security as these areas are most likely to be targeted in an attack due to the large concentration of travelers who use them on a daily basis and the disruption they cause to the economy. Additionally, terrorists seem to favor these venues for carrying out their objectives, as exemplified by past attacks throughout the world and the recent hijackings of two Russian passenger jets.

Air Travel Security

In 1978, flying became less expensive due to the deregulation of airlines. This resulted in a large increase in the number of travelers who use this medium to get from place to place. Around 1.8 million people travel on airplanes daily in the United States and several hundred thousand Americans are employed as a result of this. Accordingly, air travel is one of the most lucrative transportation systems in the nation, bringing in billions of dollars in passenger and cargo revenue annually.¹

This increase has had a significant positive financial impact on our country but has caused some challenges for the federal government's Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) in regulating aircraft design, airport security and airline safety. Additionally, Air Traffic Control, which is owned and operated by the FAA, has been overloaded by this growth.²



Photo by James Tourtellotte

It is not unusual for airplanes to be targeted by terrorists, but it is not common for them to be used as the "weapon" of destruction. (Pictured are two CBP Air Branch Citation Aircraft.)



Los Angeles International Airport (LAX)

Los Angeles International Airport (LAX), which began operation on Oct. 1, 1928, is part of the Los Angeles World Airports (LAWA). The airport occupies 3,425 acres within the city of Los Angeles and is third busiest in the world based on number of passengers and also ranks third in the world for tons of air

cargo handled.³ These figures translate to millions of passengers served yearly, millions of tons of air freight handled yearly, and billions of dollars contributed to the economy each year.

The Sept. 11 attacks closed airports across the nation and stunted the operations at these airports by 15 to 20 percent, including LAX's average 2,100 daily flights. LAX did not re-open for nearly three days following the attacks. That's around 4,000 cancelled flights during this short period.⁴ There was an eerie silence in the skies during this time for those accustomed to hearing the sounds of aircraft on an almost continual basis. All that could be heard was the occasional sound of military aircraft pacing the skies.

The airport makes a significant contribution to the region's economy, with a pre-Sept. 11 contribution of 400,000 jobs and \$60 billion annually. Following the events of Sept. 11, there were obvious concerns airport officials had to deal with to ensure the safety of passengers and cargo running through the world's busiest origin-and-destination airport. Airport officials were probably especially on alert, realizing that three of the airplanes used in the attacks were in route to Los Angeles. In addition, the airport has a phenomenal task of checking an average of more than 150,000 bags at the airport every day — more than at any other U.S. airport.⁵

The financial impact of the attacks was staggering in lost revenue from cargo and passenger traffic at LAX. The total tons of airfreight and number of passengers in 2001 showed an unusual decline, as opposed to the usual predictable increases, when compared to an evaluation from previous years.⁶

Airfreight recovered the following year by an increase of 0.34 percent, and in 2003 the freight volume increased by 2.07 percent. However, passenger travel continued to show a decline of 9.37 percent of domestic traffic and 6.93 percent of international traffic in 2002, and 2003 continued to see a downward trend of 2.25 percent of total passengers. Each terminal showed declines in passenger travel comparing 2000 figures to 2001 figures except Terminal 3, which showed an increase of 6.98 percent.



Photo by James R. Tourtellotte

Airports have become stricter in what they allow passengers to carry onboard.

Some terminals showed significant declines as high as a negative 81.04 percent change from the previous year.⁷

Air travelers have noticed a change in security at airports throughout the United States since the attacks. Among other changes, airports became much stricter in what they allow passengers to carry onboard. Items previously allowed like knives, scissors, screwdrivers, fingernail files, garden tools, toy guns, gun-shaped cigarette lighters, hammers, drills, most kitchen utensils and other weapon-like objects are now prohibited and confiscated at airport security checkpoints.

Additionally, there are new restrictions related to the transportation of cremated human remains, calling for urns that can successfully be x-rayed.

LAWA has spent a combined \$100.4 million on Sept. 11-related security measures including the addition of law enforcement personnel and explosive detection canines; increased insurance coverage; security equipment and supplies; and capital improvements to the airport's perimeter fencing, surveillance systems and passenger terminals.⁸

In 2002, the U.S. Department of Defense's Appropriations Act helps to defray these costs associated with hiring additional law enforcement personnel, airport surveillance, and revalidation of all airport-issued and approved identification.

Summary of LAX Passengers

Year	Departing	Arriving	Total Passengers
1993	24,141,068	23,703,726	47,844,794
1994	25,812,087	25,238,188	51,050,275
1995	27,234,353	26,674,870	53,909,223
1996	29,162,942	28,811,617	57,974,559
1997	30,313,688	29,828,900	60,142,588
1998	30,826,859	30,388,853	61,215,712
1999	32,298,944	31,980,627	64,279,571
2000	33,836,077	33,467,105	67,303,182
2001	31,007,930	30,598,274	61,606,204
2002	28,181,481	28,042,362	56,223,843
2003			54,956,030

Source: lawa.org/statistics/cargo1.html

Summary of LAX Air Freight

Year	Air Freight in Tons
1993	1,288,503
1994	1,516,567
1995	1,567,248
1996	1,696,663
1997	1,852,487
1998	1,787,400
1999	1,884,526
2000	2,002,614
2001	1,779,065
2002	1,869,932
2003	1,913,159

Source: lawa.org/statistics/cargo1.html

The airport is also able to hire off-duty Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) officers to provide a greater presence of patrolling officers and to provide more security. They will include foot and bike patrols and undercover personnel.⁹

“LAX was the only major U.S. airport to meet the Dec. 31, 2002 federal mandate to electronically screen 100 percent of all checked baggage. The interim solution currently operating in the passenger terminals includes nearly 60 explosive detection systems and 270 explosive trace detection machines, almost all of which are located in the passenger terminal ticketing lobbies.”¹⁰

In September 2003, in an effort to further secure LAX, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security signed a letter of intent to reimburse the airport 75 percent of the cost of installing a permanent explosive detection system integrated in-line with the checked baggage conveyor systems at the airport. This is the largest federal grant — \$235,056,000 — ever received for a single project in the airport’s 75-year history.¹¹ Los Angeles Mayor Jim Hahn is hopeful that LAX will set the standard for safety and security among the nation’s airports with the installation of this new equipment along with its other security plans. With millions of passengers moving through the airport on an annual basis, this is a true concern for many Americans and international travelers.



Photo by James R. Tourtellotte

Interviews are routinely done between CBP officers and pilots of small commercial aircrafts.

Among changes to increase security was the announcement by Mayor Hahn of the installation and addition of more than 1,200 video cameras throughout the airport, to supplement the existing video equipment already at the airport. This new system includes a central monitoring station where video will be recorded and saved by airport police. Further surveillance of passengers includes 1,600 federal passenger security screeners — the largest of any U.S. airport — hired by the Transportation Security

Administration (TSA), with more expecting to be hired.¹²

Other improvements to airport security include the addition of 60 armed, uniformed LAX airport police and improvements to fencing and other security improvements to the perimeter of the airport through a \$15 million initiative for physical and technological upgrades. This will include about eight miles of upgraded fencing with a “2-1/2-foot tall concrete rail with eight feet of heavy-duty chain-link fence and six strands of barbed wire, intrusion detection devices, increased lighting, and closed-circuit television monitoring.”¹³ Concrete foundations will also be extended above ground as a vehicle barrier.

Additionally, the Los Angeles Board of Airport Commissioners approved the purchase of a \$160,000 bomb squad robot to be stationed at the airport. Although it was originally

designed for use by the military, the robot has been adapted for local police response. Among other things, the robot is capable of hauling injured or non-ambulatory patients from hazardous situations, has night-vision capability, includes a two-way audio system, can transport suspicious items to a safe place, and is capable of crossing wet or dry surfaces or obstacles.¹⁴

Another system that can be employed in the event of a large-scale emergency, especially in relation to possible chemical or biological terrorism or other hazardous materials, is a decontamination system consisting of a truck and trailer, which carries a cost of \$243,000. LAX has two of these systems, which are operated by the fire department and have a quick set up. As many as 250 people per hour and 36 people simultaneously can be decontaminated in the event of an emergency.

“The decontamination units are suitable for use in:

- hazardous materials incidents where people or personnel are contaminated,
- aviation accidents where people or personnel are contaminated from aviation fuel,
- terrorist incidents on the airfield and at passenger terminals involving chemical or biological agents, and
- natural disasters where a first aid station is needed.”¹⁵

As passengers continue to help monitor activities with vigilance, the airport is sure to be a safer place.

Mass Transit Security

Another area of transportation concern is that of mass transit systems throughout the United States. Many individuals in different parts of the country rely heavily on commuter rail and bus transit systems to carry them throughout their daily lives. There are some that don't have a vehicle of their own because mass transit is so economical and convenient.

If you are one of the nearly 450 million Americans that use these systems every year, security for mass transit systems is a very large priority because of the concern of becoming a victim of a terrorist incident. Additionally, a huge strike could severely cripple your way of life and your means of getting safely to and from work and other places. This is not even taking into account the impact it would have on roads, highways and freeways, which would affect everyone.

The Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) Rail Passenger Security Group works to protect its properties, employees and the nation's railroad passengers that travel on intercity passenger rail systems and those who use commuter rail operations — an industry valued at approximately \$3 billion.¹⁶



Following the Sept. 11 attacks, MTA ordered a heightened level of security for its bus and rail lines, headquarters and operating divisions.

Another group as part of the TSA — the Highway Passenger Group — seeks to protect those who travel the highways on motorcoaches or intercity buses. These

Homeland Security Advisory System

The threat condition is assigned by the Attorney General in consultation with the Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and is based on intelligence received. These levels are regularly reviewed and changed as needed and can apply to the nation as a whole or to an individual geographic location or industrial sector. Although there is always a risk of a terrorist threat, the level is assigned based on the potential gravity of an attack as well as its probability. The nation is currently at a “Yellow” threat level.

Green	Blue	Yellow	Orange	Red
Low Condition	Guarded Condition	Elevated Condition	High Condition	Severe Condition
Low Risk	General Risk	Significant Risk	High Risk	Severe Risk

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) suggests the public take the following actions to protect themselves:

- Develop, continually update and review a household disaster plan and disaster supply kit.
- Educate yourself and have a plan.
- Develop a detailed communication plan in the event of an emergency.
- Apartment residents should discuss steps to be taken during an emergency with building managers.
- People with special needs should discuss their emergency plans with friends, family or employers.
- Be observant of any suspicious activity and report it to authorities.
- Contact neighbors to discuss plans and needs.
- Check with school officials to determine their plans for an emergency and procedures to reunite children with parents and caregivers.

“Orange” and “Red” threat levels have further directions and can be accessed on the DHS website.

Source:

www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/display?theme=14&content=446&print=true

vehicles are defined as being at least 35-feet in length with the ability to carry more than 30 passengers on a deck over the baggage compartment.

Part of the TSA’s mission is to provide travelers with quality customer service and to provide up-to-date information via the Internet on rail security. Its plans for the future include focus on “prevention, response, recovery, restoration of services, and restoring public confidence in the event of an accident.”¹⁷

Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA)

The Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority’s operations cover one of the country’s largest service areas, 1,433 square miles. Additionally, it is unique because it also serves one of the nation’s most-populous counties. Nearly one-third of Californians — 9.6 million people — live within its jurisdiction.¹⁸

It has more than 9,000 full-time employees, provides more than 1,900 buses and operates nearly 60 miles of line and 50 stations for rail service.¹⁹ Aside from these capacities, it also provides funding for the Call Boxes, Freeway Service Patrol, road improvements and other transportation related services with plans for more growth and expansion. The Freeway Service Patrol has 150 tow trucks, which patrol Los Angeles freeways to assist an average of 350,000 stalled motorists annually in helping to relieve congestion and help traffic flow.²⁰

Following the Sept. 11 attacks, MTA ordered a heightened level of security for its bus and rail lines, headquarters and operating divisions, according to a news release. All bus and rail systems continued with uninterrupted service; however, MTA restricted access to its buildings, facilities and Gateway Building Garage to employees only.



Nearly one-third of Californians — 9.6 million people — live within MTA's jurisdiction.

MTA continues to offer guidelines to traveling passengers to ensure a safe environment. They have suggested the following precautions:²¹

- “Be alert and observant while traveling.
- “Report any activities that seem unusual or out-of-place.
- “Report any broken equipment, missing lights or strange odors.
- “Without touching them, report any abandoned items.
- “Remember to take all your belongings when you leave a train or bus.
- “To report any problems or request assistance, contact Metro law enforcement at (888) 950-SAFE (7233).”

Summary of MTA Ridership

Line	Total Calendar Month Boardings for April 2004
Bus Lines (Does not include LADOT statistics)	243,822,650
Red Line	2,735,949
Blue Line	1,845,970
Green Line	713,906
Gold Line	399,693

Source: mta.net/news_info/ridership/rdrshpavg.htm

Many Americans were disturbed by the March 11, 2004 terrorist attacks on four commuter trains in Spain, resulting in the death of 191 people. Other recent discoveries of bombs under railroad tracks in Spain and France and the threat of terrorist attempts to our own mass transit systems is concerning when contemplating the future of our safety for commuters and those who use mass transit operations within the United States.

In May 2004, two Acela Amtrak Express trains (one near Philadelphia and the other near the Baltimore-Washington International Airport) were stopped and searched by bomb-sniffing dogs following a call from a tipster to a local law enforcement office. Nothing was found. This incident occurred just following new requirements for passenger rail security by the Department of Homeland Security, which called for the designation of security coordinators, removal of trash cans in some places, inspections, and the instruction for passengers and employees to be on alert for unattended items or suspicious behavior.²²

Never in the history of the United States has the federal government initiated “security standards for passenger rail and mass transit systems.”²³ Since the Sept. 11 attacks, \$1.7 billion has been used by transit officials to upgrade passenger safety. However, many agree that six times that amount is needed for the additional costs associated with furthering security for upgrading radio systems and closed-circuit television, providing testing for chemical and biological agents, building fences, hiring more staff and paying for overtime and training.²⁴

Our transportation systems in the United States are on high alert, with transportation authorities on edge and passengers assisting in the effort to report seemingly suspicious items in cars or at depots. Further public transportation security directives were in place for the Democratic and Republican conventions. Some changes were substantial with ceasing certain rail stops and commuter trains not traveling their normal route into the city.²⁵ Authorities are not taking lightly any terrorist threats to try and alter the 2004 presidential election along with other potential threats to bomb U.S. “rail lines and buses in major U.S. cities this summer.”²⁶



Since railroads came into existence, they have been an important part of our economy.

Railroad Security

Since railroads came into existence, they have been an important part of our economy. They haul various things, including coal, hazardous materials, automobiles, military equipment, food and many other things from coast to coast. They cover hundreds of miles and are integral to many enterprises. For these reasons, they pose an attractive target to terrorists even though few people use the rails for transportation, aside from mass transit

trains.

The Federal Railroad Administration works to “safeguard our railroads and mass transportation systems.”²⁷ Its 1940 wrecking trains statute was reviewed and determined that it needed some updating in its language to ensure that any attacks against these

systems would be appropriately punished. Upon review of the statutes, the administration recently determined eight weaknesses in the mass transit and wrecking trains definitions and has outlined ways to rectify these issues.²⁸

First, the language would be altered to expand the definition of targeting railroads by changing “‘explosive substance’ with ‘biological agent or toxin, destructive substance, or destructive device.’”²⁹ It would also further describe the protection of “‘guideways, locomotive tenders, and on-track equipment.’” Further clarifications are given to include railroads, hazardous materials (radioactive materials and spent nuclear fuel) incidents.

Second, S.2289 would give further protections to railroads and freight that are given to mass transportation systems. These include acts of terrorism including biological agents or toxins and their use in disrupting or wrecking trains, damaging a centralized dispatching facility, interfering with those who work on or maintain the trains, using a dangerous weapon on an employee or passenger of a train, and giving false information of alleged attempts to do any of the above.³⁰

Third, it enlarges the scope of prosecution of prohibited activity and substitutes the word “‘knowingly’” with the word “‘willfully.’” It also incorporates language used in the mass transportation statute to include “‘a person who travels, communicates, or transports materials across a State line in aid of the commission of the offense.’”³¹

Fourth, the bill adds “‘track’” and ‘electromagnetic guideways’ to the list of types of mass transportation infrastructure protected.”³² Additionally, it makes it a crime to “‘undermine or make the use of mass transportation infrastructure hazardous or unworkable.’”³³



Photo by Gerald L. Nino

Inspectors check out this passenger train entering the United States from Canada.



Photo by Gerald L. Nino

This train is about to be x-rayed by a high tech full-train x-ray.

Fifth, more than a billion ton-miles of hazardous materials are transported on trains each year. The bill would add a new prohibition to the law that prohibits the endangerment to human life through the release of a biological agent or toxin on or near railroad or mass transit property.³⁴

Sixth, the bill clarifies that no violation is present if the hazardous materials being transported “are in accordance with federal hazardous materials transportation law and DOT’s implementing regulations.”³⁵ Violations of this type would be civil, not criminal.

Seventh, the definition of dangerous weapons would include box cutters and other non-traditional types of weapons. Furthermore, the statute would be more explicit in the wording to ensure that attempted acts of terrorism are not only prohibited but are penalized.³⁶

“Eighth, the bill would toughen or clarify the penalties for certain violations.”³⁷

Concerns for the Future

Shoulder-Fired Missiles

A new concern arose about the safety of air travel when talk of a weapon that could down a commercial airplane began to take place. Shoulder-fired missiles are capable of intercepting an aircraft “three miles in range and two miles in altitude.”³⁸ On August 12, 2003, an attempted arms sale of this type of weapon was stopped before any damage could be done with the shoulder-fired Igla SA-18.³⁹ However, it has heightened awareness of other concerns regarding airline safety.

These weapons are not new. They were used against Soviet helicopters during the Afghan conflict in the 1980s.⁴⁰ Terrorists may lean toward their use for various reasons including cost, availability and the potential for mass casualties. On the other hand, “many of the missiles that are available are relatively old and in poor working condition, if they function at all.”⁴¹ They require extensive training for proper use and can only be used within a short range (during take off and landing).

There are solutions for evading this threat including training pilots and air controllers with procedures for avoiding these missiles, strengthening the monitoring of vulnerable areas at airports, diversion tools such as flares to intercept incoming missiles, efforts in preventing the import of this type of weaponry, and research in weapons that could counter these types of attacks.⁴²



Hijackings

As with the Sept. 11 attacks, hijackings have frequently been used by terrorists to accomplish their objectives. Recently it is believed that two Russian passenger jets were simultaneously hijacked on Aug. 24, 2004 and were subsequently crashed minutes within each other.

In speaking of the first plane, witnesses “told authorities that the plane exploded before it fell from the sky.”⁴³ It was a clear day, which further rose suspicion of a terrorist attack. “The second jet issued a distress signal indicating it had been hijacked”⁴⁴ moments before it disappeared from radar. There were no survivors found from either incident, and approximately 88 people were killed as a result of the two crashes.

The Tuesday attacks happened on the eve of the election of a new Chechen president. The republic of Chechnya has been involved in a war with Russia for many years, and Russia has since experienced many terrorist incidents as a result. No foreign citizens were on the passenger lists.⁴⁵

The events of that dark day in September have made a major impact on the way Americans travel. The way we travel has not changed since the attacks. However, it has made us aware that it is up to all of us to do our part in securing America. Being aware of our neighbors and suspicious activities or individuals could deter attacks in the future. The safety of our country and the transportation sector is not only in the hands of city planners, transportation authorities, the Department of Homeland Security, police officers, or the president of the United States. It is in the hand of every American.

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