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Testimony

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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Thompson and members of the Committee, welcome to Los Angeles International Airport. We appreciate your commitment and concern that we all share in ensuring that this airport is as safe and secure as we can make it.

Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) is the largest origin and destination airport in the United States, serving 66.7 million passengers in its nine passenger terminals. LAX has 95 passenger and cargo airlines that conducted 615,000 aircraft operations in 2013. LAX accommodated 70,000 vehicle trips per day and has 54,000 badged employees.

November 1, 2013, was like any other busy Friday morning in Terminal 3 at LAX, until an act of violence by a lone gunman set off a sequence of events that would result in the murder of Transportation Security Officer Gerardo Hernandez and the wounding of two other TSA officers and one passenger. Airport Police quickly apprehended the suspect, but there was a significant travel disruption for tens of thousands of passengers. The airport returned to full normal operations approximately 30 hours later.

In the past several months, Los Angeles World Airports (LAWA) has reviewed in detail every aspect of this incident at great length and presented a comprehensive after-action report to Mayor Eric Garcetti and the Los Angeles Board of Airport Commissioners with several key findings. This report is available for public review on the LAWA website. Immediate tactical response by Airport Police was swift, heroic, and well-executed. Collaboration with and support from response partners was effective. While the terminal and roadway recovery may have advanced faster, this had to be phased with the security need to clear all parts of the LAX campus (all nine terminals and eight parking garages) before attempting to reinstate operational recovery. Terminal 3 was rapidly repaired and returned to service after the FBI released it Saturday morning, even while the investigation continued. Finally, LAX emergency management programs are maturing, and a number of areas for improvement were identified.

In particular, the most significant challenges on November 1 centered around mass notification and public communications, terminal evacuation and interim sheltering, customer care, and ability to mobilize the entire airport community in the response. LAX has already implemented a number of specific recommendations in the report and will be implementing others in the coming months.

Law Enforcement and Homeland Security at Los Angeles International Airport

The primary law enforcement agency at LAX is the Los Angeles Airport Police. The antecedents of this organization go back to security officers first hired by the airport 64 years ago and became a full-fledged law enforcement agency in 1984. Airport Police have a staff of 1100, of which 525 are sworn, 400 are security officers and the rest are professional administrative and support staff.

Airport Police officers have trained at various law enforcement academies since 1990 and have been using the Los Angeles Police Academy exclusively since 2006. Since 2006 we have had 200 officers graduate from the academy, many of them graduating with honors and leadership positions in their recruit classes. Airport Police train alongside recruits for the Los Angeles

Police Department and the Los Angeles Port Police. They receive the same training and learn about the same policies as the other two law enforcement agencies in the City. This ensures that the City is consistent in how it trains its officers and improves the interaction between these three law enforcement agencies.

Airport Police also participates in on-going training with agencies throughout the region. One of our largest joint training exercises was an active shooter exercise held on the weekend of October 5 and 6 in 2013. We worked six months to develop what we considered to be a realistic training exercise that would rival a real world situation in an airport environment. We trained over 350 Airport Police Officers, Los Angeles Police Officers and Los Angeles Firefighters in an environment which is very different from the other scenes of active shooter incidents such as the Aurora, Colorado movie theater shooting, Sandy Hook Elementary School and the Washington Naval Yard shooting. We worked on numerous scenarios involving an active shooter in an effort to test and improve our tactics and to decrease our response time to such incidents.

LAX is a unique environment from any other in the City of Los Angeles and it presents special challenges to law enforcement and security. In addition to maintaining a highly visible presence through foot patrols and beats, Airport Police embrace a layered approach to security with an emphasis on strong partnerships, intelligence gathering, patrol missions/strategies and plainclothes details. Daily enforcement strategies are aimed at hardening LAX as a target for terrorism as well as other crimes that occur in an urban environment. The goal of all officers in whatever assignment they work is to deter and stop criminal and terrorist acts. Unfortunately as Airport Police and other law enforcement agencies have discovered, you cannot always deter an attack by someone committed to an act of destruction such as the gunman we had here on November 1, 2013.

Since 1968, there have been 817 terror incidents involving airports and airlines, over 50 in the United States. Nine of these were specific to United States airports of which seven have targeted LAX. One of our concerns when we were pulling together our October training exercise was the shift from a Mumbai-type of incident with multiple attacks spread out through a metropolitan area to the most prevalent type of active shooter incident experienced in the United States – the lone wolf shooting. This involves a single individual with some sort of destructive intention who takes out their anger on a particular setting, be it a movie theater, elementary school or other public place.

We had to ask ourselves how we would handle such a situation in an airport environment. How would we respond most quickly and effectively once the shooting has started and stop it as soon as possible? We always have to look at a wide variety of risks at the airport, but we decided last year this was the type of risk for which we needed to prepare.

November 1, 2013

The terminals at LAX are arranged in a counter-clockwise loop starting with Terminals 1, 2 and 3. At the far end of the loop is the Tom Bradley International Terminal. The Central Terminal Area then continues with Terminals 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 at the bottom of the loop. Each terminal has three levels. The lower level is the arrival level where passengers pick up their bags and exit

from the terminal upon deplaning from their flights. The second level is the “departure” level where passengers are normally dropped off in front of the terminals and then go inside for ticketing and bag check-in. The third level is where the airline gates are located in the “secured area” behind TSA screening checkpoints.

On November 1, 2013, Mr. Paul Ciancia came to LAX in a vehicle driven by a friend and was dropped off on the “upper” or departure level of the airport as would a typical departing passenger. Mr. Ciancia walked through the door near the Virgin America ticketing counter at approximately 9:18 AM and proceeded to enter the queuing line for a TSA boarding pass check point, which was on the departure level at the foot of an escalator leading up to the security and gate area. Mr. Ciancia was dressed as a typical traveler. He had a roller bag with a second bag attached to the top of it, typical of the kind of bags people bring to airports and stow on the aircraft.

At the end of the queuing line, at the bottom of the escalator, was a TSA podium staffed by TSA Officer Gerardo Hernandez. Mr. Hernandez was performing document checks for TSA, checking passengers for their ID and boarding passes. Officer Hernandez by all accounts was a jovial individual who enjoyed his experience as a TSA officer, friendly to the passengers he was screening. From the video of the incident, we know he was talking to passengers he had just screened when the shooting occurred.

At 9:20 AM, Mr. Ciancia removed an assault rifle from his bag and shot Officer Hernandez from the back. He went up the escalator just a few steps but then came back down and shot Officer Hernandez multiple times once again.

As the shots were fired, panic and chaos set in as expected, but very quickly the TSA officers at the upper-level checkpoint and passengers began to evacuate people away from where the shots were being fired. Video of the incident shows heroic acts by TSA officers who put themselves and their safety at jeopardy to make sure their passengers got out of the line of fire. The initial reaction to the shooting was people going to the floor. That was for just a moment before you can hear TSA officers beginning to direct people in the correct direction, away from the shooting.

Shortly after the incident occurred, the first call came into Airport Police dispatch. The first call was made from a dedicated line at the TSA checkpoint that went straight to the Airport Police dispatch center. The TSA supervisor tried to place a call but had to leave the area without being able to provide any additional information. An airline contract service employee near Officer Hernandez used his cellular telephone to call Airport Police. Within a minute or so, Airport Police had a full description of the incident so our officers could respond to the area as quickly as possible.

Following the shooting Mr. Ciancia went up the escalator, through the evacuated TSA passenger screening checkpoint, and into the concourse looking for other TSA officers. He shot and wounded two other TSA officers and one civilian.

In this time, Airport Police officers converged on Terminal 3 from many different directions. As the officers arrived, they were directed towards Mr. Ciancia by civilians in the terminal. The officers confronted Mr. Ciancia toward the end of the terminal near Gate 35 where an officer-involved shooting took place. Mr. Ciancia was stopped at that moment and he was taken into custody.

The shooting of Officer Hernandez took place at approximately 9:20 AM. At 9:21 AM, our Airport Police dispatch center broadcast a “shots fired” call for Terminal 3. At 9:25 AM, Los Angeles Airport Police officers reported the suspect was “down” at Gate 35. 4 minutes and 8 seconds elapsed from the time that news of the shooting was broadcast by our dispatch center to the time that our officers reported the shooter was “down” in the terminal. The actual elapsed time was actually shorter, considering that it took some time to safely approach the suspect, handcuff him, and for officers to render Ciancia’s weapon safe.

The impact of the law enforcement action on flight operations and the passengers at LAX was significant. Of the 1550 flights scheduled for that day, airlines canceled 252 flights and diverted 86 flights to other airports, while 74 flights were delayed. Sixteen arriving flights were held on board for longer than 30 minutes, as gates were not available after ramp workers evacuated. With LAX effectively shut down, though, there were ripple effects throughout the air transportation system, with an estimated 1500 flights impacted. As stated above, LAX, including Terminal 3, returned to full operations on November 2, approximately 30 hours after the shooting.

At the time of the shooting, approximately 23,000 passengers were at the airport. Many in Terminals 1, 2, and 3 self-evacuated, while those in other terminals and on aircraft were sheltered in place. Approximately 3500 passengers in Terminals 1, 2, and 3 evacuated to the airfield during the incident and were then bused to appropriate facilities. While some passengers left the airport area, others who were expecting to depart continued to arrive at the airport, adding to the congestion and traffic gridlock.

LAX staff established twelve evacuation and shelter sites, and distributed 16,000 bottles of water. The Los Angeles County Mental Health Department, the Los Angeles City Department on Disabilities, and the Red Cross assisted with passenger accommodations. LAWA also made extensive use of the news media and social media website to communicate information to the traveling public.

Analysis

In an incident such as this, the most important factor is speed, how quickly first-responders can get to the incident. The first responsibility for police officers is to stop the shooter. The responsibility of the EMS/Fire Department is to rescue victims as fast as they can. In this case, the speed with which Airport Police were able to stop this suspect and keep him from finding other TSA officers to shoot was very, very fast. We do not, however “rest on our laurels.” Our intent, and what we are always trying to do, is to find how we could do better.

The suspect was stopped due to the bravery of the officers that went into that terminal knowing there was an active shooter with some sort of an assault weapon, the superior tactics they used,

and the speed with which they responded. Some have suggested that events may have transpired differently had there been a police officer posted at the checkpoint. When one officer is facing a suspect with an assault rifle, there is no guarantee of success - take on someone with an assault weapon one on one, you may lose more times than you win. Success is much more likely when officers come together as a team in a tactical formation to attack the problem, because the threat posed by the suspect or suspects is met with an equal amount of threat. Even though the officers who responded to the call did not have police rifles or semi-automatic weapons, their tactics and their proficiency in the way they worked together to flank the suspect and confuse him led to taking this suspect into custody. The key is to employ outstanding tactics and speed and coordination by several officers working as a team.

Officer Hernandez, the first TSA officer killed in the line of duty, made the ultimate sacrifice while working to protect his fellow citizens from violence aimed at the traveling public. In addition, there are other victims to remember. Brian Ludmer was a 29-year old school teacher from Illinois who was shot and sustained a serious leg injury while standing near some TSA officers. Two other victims are TSA Officers James Speer and Tony Grigsby, who deserve more credit than they received at the time of the incident for their bravery. There was an elderly citizen at the checkpoint who froze when the when the shooting occurred. For some reason, he did not react as fast as the others. In spite of the shooting, the two TSA officers stayed in order to make sure that this individual got out safely. As they lagged behind trying to get him to safety, one was shot in the chest and the other one in the foot. Officers Speer and Grigsby are true heroes of this incident, having put themselves in jeopardy because it was the right thing to do.

Even though the shooter was in custody, communications, traffic control and tactical operations were still complicated. We did not know if there were other shooters. We did not know if there was a vehicle with a bomb or a secondary device placed in the airport area. LAX handles about 100,000 passengers leaving each day and another 100,000 passengers arriving and 70,000 cars that go through in the central terminal area, and it is a massive undertaking to make sure that we keep people safe. It was necessary to shut down operations and we could only re-open when we were certain we were not putting anyone in harm's way.

Another key success was the interagency teamwork. Multiple law enforcement agencies responded to this incident, not only the Los Angeles Police Department which had a number of officers located here. The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, the California Highway Patrol, and police departments of the Cities of El Segundo and Hawthorne all responded, along with the Los Angeles City Fire Department. Teamwork and coordination worked, as did our incident command. It was at times chaotic and challenging, but there are lessons that will be learned from this as we look forward and see how to improve. Everyone that was there that day was there for the same purpose – to keep the airport safe and open it as soon as possible.

Los Angeles International Airport will work on ways to improve communications, to ensure that employees at the airport are able to reach Airport Police dispatch as easily and quickly as possible in case of emergency. We will look to working with our regional partners for technology that can improve radio interoperability.

Airport Police will continue to train with the Los Angeles Fire Department to deal with active shooter and similar situations. The Los Angeles Fire Department has trained 200 of its officers who handle calls in the LAX area on tactical emergency medical services. They are now trained in how to respond to a “warm zone” area to treat patients effectively while at the same time being sure they do not put themselves into danger. We want to make sure they have force protection as they provide medical treatment and will put our officers through the same training.

Law enforcement has made considerable changes in the way it responds to active shooter incidents since Columbine High School in 1999. At Columbine it was 46 minutes before law enforcement went into that school. To get our time down to 4 minutes and 8 seconds from the first call to when we had the shooter in custody is remarkable. Even so, we continually look for ways to improve our response, but instead of improving by ten minute increments, we are now trying to save seconds. We are fine-tuning our procedures and tactics so we can save those seconds and lives.

As described briefly above, at the direction of the Los Angeles Board of Airport Commissioners, LAWA conducted an exhaustive three and a half month review of the November 1 shooting and has published a comprehensive after-action report detailing the response and recovery efforts. The report assesses what happened, what could have been prevented, what response efforts worked well, and what areas of emergency management need improvement. The report also includes an improvement plan based on the recommendation drawn from lessons learned during the incident. In preparing this 83-page report, LAWA took a detailed look at every aspect of the incident and challenged ourselves to be better prepared for any future attacks or other disasters at our airports. The report is available on the LAWA website.