

**Testimony of
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Philadelphia, PA**

**Before the House Committee on Homeland Security
Subcommittee on Transportation and Protective Security**

“Securing Public Areas of Transportation Systems: Stakeholder Perspectives”

**Tuesday, November 28, 2017 at 10:00 AM
City Council Chambers, Trenton City Hall, Trenton, New Jersey**

Good morning Chairman Katko, Ranking Member Watson-Coleman, Congressman Fitzpatrick and the other Members of the Transportation and Protective Security Subcommittee. Thank you for holding this important hearing on securing public areas of transportation systems. On behalf of our Board Chairman Pasquale T. “Pat” Deon, Sr., General Manager Jeffrey D. Knueppel and the members of the SEPTA Transit Police Department, I am grateful for the opportunity to testify today about security at the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) and discuss our policing strategies, technology deployment and inter-agency partnerships.

My name is Thomas J. Nestel, III. I have served as the Chief of the SEPTA Transit Police Department since August 2012. I began my career in law enforcement in 1982 as a Patrol Officer with the SEPTA Transit Police. I then served on the Philadelphia Police Department for 22 years, attaining the rank of Staff Inspector, and later as the Chief of Police for Upper Moreland Township (Montgomery County, PA). I received a Bachelor’s degree in Criminal Justice from Chestnut Hill College, a Master of Science in Public Safety from Saint Joseph’s University, a Master of Arts in National Security Studies from the United States Naval Postgraduate School, and a Master of Science in Criminology from the University of Pennsylvania. I am currently completing a Doctorate in Criminology at the University of Pennsylvania.

SEPTA is the sixth largest public transportation system in the nation, and the largest in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, serving more than four million people living across 2,200 square miles in the five counties of southeastern Pennsylvania (Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery and Philadelphia). The SEPTA system is an expansive multimodal transit system, operating buses, subways, trolleys, Regional Rail (commuter rail), trackless trolleys, an interurban highspeed line and paratransit. Regional Rail service extends to Trenton and West Trenton, New Jersey and Wilmington and Newark, Delaware. The Authority maintains 230 active rail stations, over 450 miles of track, and more than 2,350 bus and rail revenue vehicles. In the Fiscal Year ending June 30, 2017, SEPTA provided more than 308 million unlinked passenger trips – an average of approximately one million trips each weekday – on 150 fixed bus and rail routes.

As Chief of the SEPTA Transit Police Department, I have the honor of leading 270 sworn officers whose core mission – providing for the safety and security of SEPTA’s one million daily

customers, 9,400 employees and the communities we serve – is guided by a commitment to service, integrity and professionalism. Formed in 1981, the SEPTA Transit Police Department is now the fifth largest police department in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. SEPTA Transit Police officers are commissioned by the Governor and exercise full police powers in the five-county area served by SEPTA, as well as New Jersey and Delaware. SEPTA most recently received the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) Gold Standard Award in 2016, scoring in the top 10 percent of transit agencies evaluated through TSA's Baseline Assessment for Security Enhancement (BASE) Program, a voluntary evaluation of 17 security and emergency preparedness action items.

The five southeastern Pennsylvania counties that make up the majority of the SEPTA service area are the engine of Pennsylvania's economy, generating 41 percent of the state's economic activity, with 32 percent of its population on just five (5) percent of its land. This degree of productivity would not be possible without safe, reliable and accessible public transportation. That accessibility and openness – hallmarks of what makes SEPTA, and all public transportation, such an important regional asset – are the very conditions that keep me up at night.

SEPTA Transit Police officers work hard every day to respond to public safety matters and personal and property crimes while preparing for unknown and unthinkable threats. Protecting SEPTA's multimodal and heavily-used transit system from terrorism is an immense responsibility. The urgency of which, I am pleased to say, is understood and shared by SEPTA leadership, SEPTA Transit Police, federal, state and local law enforcement partners, and our employees and customers.

Uniformed police officers patrolling the SEPTA system are the most visible public face of our policing efforts, riding buses and rail vehicles, patrolling stations and providing a first response to any incident. Their vigilance and presence has helped reduce crime and make SEPTA safer.

In addition to regular patrols, SEPTA's policing activities are augmented by Special Operations Units that assist in the day-to-day operations of the police department, concentrating law enforcement efforts on counterterrorism, training, and weapons of mass destruction detection and prevention. SEPTA special operators serve in a variety of units:

- The members of SEPTA's Special Operations Response Team (SORT) Unit have received specialized training to handle situations such as armed hijacking, hostage situations, chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear (CBRN) and tactical response. The SORT unit is comprised of 12 officers, 2 sergeants and 1 lieutenant.
- SEPTA's Canine (K-9) Unit currently has 14 specially trained bomb sniffing dogs (4 TSA-certified), who are deployed along with an officer to the daily unattended bag reports. These rapid response teams are the foundation to swiftly evaluate the threat of an unattended bag.
- The Tactical Unit teams of uniform, canine, and plain clothes officers are specifically deployed during peak travel hours to address crime patterns and quality of life issues throughout the transportation system.

- The Transit Police Department's Criminal Investigations Section (CIS) investigates crimes committed on SEPTA property. The CIS works with many local, state and federal law enforcement departments and has a detective assigned to a regional FBI Multi-Agency joint Terrorism Task Force.

While well trained and properly equipped police personnel are both the first and last line of defense, technology is an indispensable part of SEPTA's security and counterterrorism efforts. It expands the reach of law enforcement to every corner of our service territory, it enables and maximizes the effectiveness of inter-agency coordination and communication, and it puts critical information into the hands of officers patrolling our vehicles and stations.

Closed circuit television (CCTV) cameras are a critical component of SEPTA's policing strategy, with approximately 27,300 fixed and mobile cameras deployed throughout the system. Cameras in stations can be viewed live, allowing SEPTA police and operations personnel in SEPTA's Control Center to monitor activities and incidents in real time. These virtual patrols allow Transit Police officers to provide greater coverage and deliver valuable information to responding officers. Camera footage on vehicles can be downloaded at the scene of an incident and this information has aided SEPTA and Philadelphia Police in the apprehension of suspects and securing convictions.

SEPTA took the lead in developing interoperable communications with the hundreds of law enforcement and public safety departments in the communities SEPTA serves. SEPTA developed a radio interoperability system (RIOS) that allows dissimilar communications systems to communicate during major incidents when more than one agency responds to more than one scene. Additionally, because so much of SEPTA's transit infrastructure in the City of Philadelphia is under ground, SEPTA is investing approximately \$25 million to replace 40-year old radiax cable in the Market-Frankford Subway and Broad Street Subway, and procure new radio equipment for the Market Street, Trolley, and Regional Rail tunnels. This will upgrade SEPTA's subsurface communications, and will enable Philadelphia police, fire and emergency medical services that operate on a different bandwidth from SEPTA, to communicate both above and below ground.

Earlier this year, SEPTA partnered with a ELERTS Corp. to release SEPTA Transit Watch, a mobile app that empowers SEPTA customers to discreetly report security or safety issues directly to SEPTA Transit Police in a matter of seconds. The national "If You See Something, Say Something" campaign has taught us that our customers play a vital role in helping secure the transit system as well as their fellow riders, and the Transit Watch App is a way for them to communicate with SEPTA Transit Police and provide real-time information that can make a critical difference to responding personnel.

In partnership with Amtrak, New Jersey Transit and PATCO, SEPTA is an active participant in the regional "Look up. Speak Up" transit security campaign. Upon being named General Manager in 2015, Jeff Knueppel renewed and strengthened the Authority's commitment to safety and security – making safety the foundation of everything we do. Through the annual "Make the Safe Choice" safety awareness day and monthly safety blitzes, SEPTA provides customers with

information and resources to be safe and observant riders and remind them of the key role they have in helping keep their fellow customers safe.

Similarly, SEPTA holds two annual “Never too Busy for Safety” employee safety days for managers and direct reports to discuss safety protocols and concerns. SEPTA employees, along with our customers, are the eyes and ears of the system, last year, our entire workforce received training on anti-terrorism and security awareness to help identify suspicious incidents or individuals and how to properly report them. This year, SEPTA employees received video instruction on what to do in the event of an active shooter situation. Because SEPTA regularly and proactively engages its customers and employees on matters of safety and security, and not just when issues arise, SEPTA has credibility when reaching out to customers to “Look up. Speak up” or “See Something, Say Something.”

Securing public areas of transportation systems against terrorism and mass casualty incidents requires regional, inter-agency collaboration, training and information sharing. Federal, state and local law enforcement coordination proved vital over the past several years as the Greater Philadelphia region hosted major national and international events, including the 2013 United States Open, the 2015 Papal Visit, the 2016 Democratic National Convention (DNC) and the 2017 National Football League Draft (the Papal Visit and DNC were both National Special Security Events (NSSE) under the direction of the United States Secret Service).

Preparedness and tactical assistance from the Department of Homeland Security, TSA and FBI are also invaluable resources for local and regional coordination. Following national or international terrorism or mass casualty events, TSA shares information and threat assessments with transportation law enforcement officials that have helped SEPTA evaluate procedures and develop new responses and protocols. In response to a recent TSA Security Awareness Message regarding rail and track infrastructure, SEPTA responded by deploying aerial drones as a force multiplier in delivering security on our track network.

However, it is the day-to-day intelligence and resource sharing that is such an effective law enforcement tool. In this region, we are fortunate to work effectively with the Philadelphia Police Department, the Philadelphia Fire Department, the Philadelphia Office of Emergency Management, the Pennsylvania State Police, county and local law enforcement, and our partners in public and rail transportation, including PATCO, NJ Transit, DART – members with SEPTA of the Philadelphia Area Regional Transit Security Working Group (PARTSWG) – and Amtrak.

SEPTA is a working partner in the Delaware Valley Intelligence Center (DVIC) initiative – the regional intelligence fusion center that integrates federal, state and local law enforcement agencies to facilitate information and resource sharing to enhance the region’s ability to detect, prevent and respond to emerging threats, terrorism and other suspicious activities. SEPTA has an officer assigned to the DVIC and video feeds from SEPTA transit facilities are made available to DVIC personnel in real time.

The Department of Homeland Security's Transit Security Grant Program (TSGP) is perhaps SEPTA's most effective federal security partnership. The TSGP provides funds to operators of public transportation systems to protect critical surface transportation assets and the traveling public from acts of terrorism, and to increase the resilience of transit infrastructure. From this grant program, SEPTA has funded closed CCTV cameras on vehicles, multi-jurisdictional counter terrorism emergency simulation drills on various transit modes, directed SEPTA Transit Police Patrols in strategically designated areas during periods of elevated alert using specially trained anti-terrorism teams, hazardous material identification kits for SORT operations, the purchase of explosive detection devices, intrusion detection and surveillance equipment, and bulletproof vests, upgraded mobile communications and Control Center monitoring equipment, installation of video surveillance cameras at transit facilities, RIOS implementation, and maintenance of a computer aided dispatch and records management system (CAD/RMS) for the Philadelphia region. The grant has also funded SORT and K-9 patrol teams. However, as funding for the grant program has been significantly reduced in recent years, SEPTA has been severely limited in its ability to use TSGP funding for anything other than sustaining existing special operations teams.

From Fiscal Year 2012 to 2017, SEPTA received \$15.3 million in TSGP funding, including \$3.8 million in FY 2017. On average, SEPTA typically receives one-third of the TSGP funding that it applies for, and while these are three-year grants, SEPTA generally expends its allotment during a single fiscal year. Like most federal programs, demand for TSGP far outpaces available funding, and funding nationally for TSGP has dropped by 75 percent since 2009. If not for SEPTA absorbing the cost, critical security and antiterrorism activities would go unfunded. SEPTA, and transit agencies across the nation, are partners in securing their communities and preventing acts of terrorism. We need strong federal support to ensure our efforts are effective, and I am grateful to the Members of this Subcommittee for working to preserve the program and authorize increased funding for transit agencies to support this national priority.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee on SEPTA's efforts to secure our system for our customers, employees and the region. I look forward to answering any questions that you may have.