

ORAL STATEMENT
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BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING, TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
COMMITTEE ON BANKING, HOUSING AND URBAN AFFAIRS
U.S. SENATE
Superstorm Sandy: Rebuilding our Housing and Transit Infrastructure
DECEMBER 20, 2012

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member DeMint, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for inviting me here today to review Hurricane Sandy's devastating impact on public transportation and discuss the Obama Administration's budget request for assistance through the Federal Transit Administration's newly authorized Public Transit Emergency Relief program.

Hurricane Sandy triggered the worst transit disaster in U.S. history. On the Tuesday morning following the storm, more than half of the nation's daily transit riders were without service. Even in the days that followed, as services in Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C. came back on line, 37 percent, or well over one-third, of the nation's public transit riders still had no access to regular train or bus service in New York and New Jersey.

We applaud the outstanding and tireless efforts of emergency responders throughout the region who worked together with all the affected transportation agencies to restore as much service as possible, as quickly as possible.

FTA and the Department of Transportation also have been proactively engaged throughout this event. For example, FTA worked with FEMA and the GSA to procure 250 buses to provide mobility for thousands of stranded commuters in New Jersey. I personally got on the phone to secure donated buses as well. And we worked with CTA in Chicago to secure rare but much-needed signal equipment for PATH. In addition, we stood up a regional emergency response coordinator for New England and repositioned staff at joint field offices in New York and New Jersey.

However, there is still much work to be done.

President Obama's Supplemental Appropriations Request for Disaster Assistance seeks \$60.4 billion in federal resources for response, recovery and mitigation.

DOT's share of the President's request is \$12.07 billion. Of that, \$11.7 billion—the majority portion—would directly support FTA's efforts to repair and replace the affected public transit infrastructure and make it far more resilient.

These funds would be administered through FTA's new Public Transportation Emergency Relief Program. I want to thank the Senate Banking Committee for its leadership in establishing this program in MAP-21 in response to the Administration's budget request and my testimony before the full Committee in May of 2011. I am also grateful to the Senate Appropriations Committee for responding to the President's request for aid under this program.

The support of both committees was both timely and prescient, as our new Emergency Relief program strengthens FTA's authority to provide financial disaster assistance to transit agencies in times of greatest need and to better coordinate with FEMA.

FTA's request reflects two major priorities.

First, we are requesting \$6.2 billion to aid in repairing and restoring public transportation infrastructure in the affected areas of New York and New Jersey. FTA staff and contractors are now working side by side with FEMA on damage assessments and cost-validation work for both operating and capital costs needed to restore and rebuild transit capacity. These early joint efforts should allow us to compensate the impacted transit agencies promptly once assistance is made available by Congress. Importantly, we have an opportunity through this process to reach a single cost estimate for each damaged asset, or set of assets, which can then serve as the basis for reimbursement from our Emergency Relief program.

Second, we request \$5.5 billion to make transit facilities more resilient to better withstand severe coastal flooding and other weather-related challenges.

This country and its people cannot afford to endure the loss of life and property that occurs when catastrophic events repeat themselves over and over again. The sums needed to "harden" transit systems to protect them from such disasters far outweigh the costs to repair and restore the infrastructure multiple times.

Under our budget request, funds invested in projects to mitigate against future disasters will be guided by regional response plans with guidance and assistance from FTA and other federal agencies along with state and local governments. Indeed, regional cooperation will be critically important for identifying the right resiliency investments.

President Obama earlier this month established the Hurricane Sandy Rebuilding Task Force, with HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan as its chairman.

Deputy Transportation Secretary John Porcari and I have wasted no time in jump-starting the coordination of our resiliency investments. We met last week in New York with Secretary Donovan and executives of Amtrak, the MTA, New Jersey Transit, and the Port Authority to discuss resiliency investments and the need for multi-agency collaboration with the Task Force.

As regional response plans are formulated, they will give rise to proposed resiliency projects that can be ranked by their estimated cost-effectiveness, and developed in coordination with the Task Force.

We cannot, as a nation, afford to be caught unprepared time after time as hurricanes and other climate-related events befall us with little warning. We must prepare, and be prepared, to protect and preserve the public transportation infrastructure and other assets that the United States depends on to move people and goods, maintain the free flow of commerce, and drive our economy forward.

FTA and DOT will continue to work with all partners at the table—federal, regional, and local—to recover from this disaster and apply new lessons learned for the future. And we are committed to ensuring all federal resources appropriated to us are used responsibly and that the recovery effort is a shared undertaking.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.