



TESTIMONY OF

David P. Pecoske  
Administrator  
Transportation Security Administration

BEFORE

U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Homeland Security  
Subcommittee on Transportation and Maritime Security

ON

“Securing America’s Transportation and Maritime Systems:  
A Review of the Fiscal Year 2021 Budget Requests for the  
Transportation Security Administration and the U.S. Coast Guard”

March 11, 2020  
Washington, DC

Good morning Chairman Correa, Ranking Member Lesko, and distinguished members of the subcommittee. Thank you for inviting me to testify on the President's FY 2021 Budget Request, which includes an \$8.24 billion request for the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). I am honored to be here and grateful for the longstanding and constructive relationship that TSA enjoys with this subcommittee.

TSA was established by the *Aviation and Transportation Security Act (ATSA)* in the wake of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. The world has changed since then, but our fundamental mission, to protect the nation's transportation systems to ensure freedom of movement for people and commerce, has not. To that end, as it relates to the current national response to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak, TSA is supporting the President's Task Force by exercising its authority under ATSA to limit who may board commercial aircraft destined for the U.S. We are also working tirelessly to ensure our workforce is safe and following the guidance provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Occupational Safety and Health Administration to reduce the chance of infection.

While we remain steadfast in providing the highest level of security for the U.S. across all modes of transportation, the scope and complexity of that goal has increased over the last two decades. Today, the U.S. transportation systems accommodate approximately 965 million domestic and international aviation passengers per year; over 5.3 billion passengers traveling on both transit and over-the-road buses each year; more than 10.1 billion passenger trips on mass transit per year; 26 million students daily on school buses; and nearly 900,000 chemical shipments every day on trucks. Our interconnected transportation system and infrastructure includes approximately 440 federalized airports; 126,000 miles of railroad tracks; 4.2 million miles of highway; 615,000 highway bridges; 473 road tunnels; and 2.5 million miles of pipeline.

Since TSA's creation, the modes and methods of terrorist attacks have become more decentralized and opportunistic than ever before. Aviation and transport hubs, however, remain highly-valued targets. Our adversaries are watching us, studying our vulnerabilities, and working hard to formulate new attack strategies to replace those that have failed. The daily threat environment TSA faces in the aviation, surface, and cyber security realms is persistent, pervasive, and constantly evolving. To meet the challenge created by such adversaries, we must innovate, deploy new solutions rapidly and effectively, and maximize the impact of our resources.

Our continuing vision is to be an agile security agency, embodied by a professional workforce that engages its partners and the American people to outmatch a dynamic threat. To that end, in April 2018, I issued the 2018-2026 TSA Strategy, which established three strategic priorities to guide the agency's workforce through its 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary: Improve Security and Safeguard the Transportation System; Accelerate Action; and Commit to Our People. I subsequently published my Administrator's Intent delineating short and medium-term objectives for the first three years to achieve those priorities.

Further empowering TSA to execute its mission, serve as a global leader in transportation, and become an employer of choice, the *TSA Modernization Act of 2018*, the agency's first comprehensive reauthorization since inception, was enacted in October 2018. The *TSA Modernization Act* authorized funding for Fiscal Years 2019, 2020, and 2021; enhanced organizational structures, operations, and processes; and established a five-year term for the Administrator – a critically important factor for ensuring organizational stability and setting and achieving longer term agency goals.

As I come before you today, slightly more than halfway through my term as Administrator and at a point where we are developing the next version of the Administrator's Intent, I want to thank Congress for the authorities provided to TSA through the *TSA Modernization Act*. Currently, TSA has completed more than 80 percent of the Act's requirements with deadlines. Consistent with the *TSA Modernization Act*, TSA elevated Headquarters leadership positions associated with Surface Transportation Security, Air Cargo Security, and Trusted and Registered Traveler Programs; established a Surface Transportation Security Advisory Committee and Domestic Explosives Detection Canine Breeding Workgroup to provide stakeholder input on critically important issues; and initiated pilot programs associated with the use of Computed Tomography units for the screening of air cargo and evaluating exit lane technology. TSA also conducted vulnerability and risk assessments of the surface transportation systems and stakeholder surveys that will inform risk-based budgeting and resource allocation.

In short, I want to express my gratitude for the authorities and appropriations provided to TSA that have enabled us to execute our mission and make significant progress on a number of strategic priorities. Additionally, I want to use this opportunity to convey both what we have accomplished and our future goals and objectives. In FY 2019, we –

- Screened approximately 839 million aviation passengers (with a peak volume of 2.8 million passengers in one day), representing a 4.3 percent checkpoint volume increase from FY 2018;
- Screened 1.9 billion carry-on items and more than 510 million checked bags;
- Procured 300 Computed Tomography (CT) units and began preparation for the nationwide deployment of CT systems; and

- Conducted 1,693 air carrier inspections at foreign airports, 144 foreign airport assessments, 60 pipeline critical facility security reviews, 107 assessments of mass transit operator security enhancements, and 182 assessments of security enhancements by motor carriers;

The FY 2021 President's Budget continues to support TSA's strategy to improve security and safeguard the Nation's transportation system, accelerate action, and reinforce TSA's commitment to its people. It supports \$3.5 billion for our Transportation Security Officers (TSOs) at the Nation's airports. We thank Congress for the continued support you've provided for the TSO staffing increases needed to meet wait time standards as well as increasing volumes. This investment will allow us to maintain acceptable wait times, and mitigate risk associated with crowding at checkpoints.

To complement a well-trained, sufficiently sized workforce, TSA is also focused on strengthening checkpoint operations through the development and acquisition of new technology. To this end, we are in the process of acquiring Computed Tomography (CT) units and Credential Authentication Technology (CAT) units, which represent significant technologic enhancements from the equipment currently used for identity verification and the screening of accessible property, and deploying them to airports nationwide as quickly as possible. CT technology will provide superior detection capability, will be more convenient for passengers, and eventually may eliminate the requirement to take electronics, liquids, aerosols, and gels out of carry-on bags.

As of February 25, 2020, there are 65 CT units deployed to checkpoints with another 49 units supporting testing and research and development. The FY 2021 President's Budget provides \$28.9 million to support the procurement of 30 full-size CT units. The FY 2021 funding

will enable TSA to continue to accelerate the provision of CT technology to the field to enable our workforce to more effectively and efficiently execute the mission.

CAT also provides a significant security upgrade to the identification verification and prescreening process. Ultimately, CAT will enable Secure Flight screening status to be known and cross-checked in near real time. In FY 2019, TSA procured 505 CAT units, with 480 units deployed as of February 10, 2020. The FY 2021 President's Budget includes \$2.3 million that will bring the number of CAT units to 1,520 nationwide. The continued rollout of CAT units to checkpoints will improve TSA's ability to detect fraudulent documents and screen passengers based on assessed risk. The CAT unit has also served as a key tool for TSA's efforts to meet the *TSA Modernization Act* requirement for TSA Pre✓<sup>®</sup> lanes to only serve passengers with Known Traveler Numbers, which will improve the TSA Pre✓<sup>®</sup> passenger experience, and serve as a platform for testing voluntary facial matching technology.

Finally, TSA strives through continued investment to improve the Advanced Imaging Technology (AIT) being used at our checkpoints today. The FY 2021 President's Budget provides \$5 million to develop Next Gen AIT systems, and an additional \$3 million of funding for research and development enhancements for Emerging Alarm Resolution technologies.

Our frontline workforce can better execute their security mission when equipped with the technology needed to counter evolving threats. While sustained technological improvement at our checkpoints is critically important, we are also committed to investing in our most important asset, our people. TSA is pleased that our employees provide input into the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey, values their feedback, and acknowledges the concerns regarding pay dissatisfaction expressed through the survey. In an effort to address this longstanding workforce challenge, I commissioned a Blue-Ribbon Panel of public and private sector human

capital experts last year to identify problems and recommend solutions. In 2019, we received a number of recommendations from the panel, including that TSA should better leverage the authorities and flexibilities provided through *ATSA* rather than convert to the General Schedule.

Recently, TSA has addressed locality driven turnover issues through the use of retention incentives as a short-term fix for retaining TSOs in particularly competitive markets.

Concurrently, we took measures to create career paths that aligned increased pay to enhanced training and skills by implementing the TSO Career Progression initiative. Through the FY 2021 President's Budget, TSA is transitioning away from relying predominantly on employing retention incentives at specific locations and instead adopting a more holistic and permanent solution by investing in career service pay, which will create a more predictable system for salary increases over a TSO's career. Additionally, the FY 2021 Budget supports the implementation of a second phase of our TSO Career Progression initiative, a merit based promotion to 7,500 top performing TSOs.

The FY 2021 President's Budget funds two workforce initiatives and represents a significant long-term commitment to our workforce that will help address these concerns. First, the Budget includes \$23.6 million for Service Pay to fund predictable, annual pay increases for TSOs who demonstrate service experience. The Budget also seeks \$11.3 million for the second phase of TSO Career Progression, an investment that will enable TSA to provide a three percent pay increase to screeners who demonstrate higher skill levels in checkpoint operations. Although TSA has the legal authority to implement these workforce improvements, TSA requires the budgetary resources to provide these additional workforce improvements to TSOs. We are confident that the investment in Service Pay and funding of the second phase of the TSO Career

Progression initiative demonstrate how we can employ our *ATSA* authorities to make TSA an employer of choice.

Finally, in conjunction with the FY 2021 President's Budget, the Administration has proposed raising the Aviation Passenger Security Fee, also known as the September 11<sup>th</sup> Security Fee, in order to fully cover the costs of aviation security by FY 2028. The fee was created to cover the costs of aviation security, but in FY 2020 only covers 39 percent of today's costs. The proposal would increase the fee by one dollar, from \$5.60 to \$6.60 per one-way trip in FY 2021 and from \$6.60 to \$8.25 in FY 2022. This measure would generate \$618 million in new revenue in FY 2021 and close to \$28 billion in new revenue over the next 10 years.

Securing our Nation's transportation system is a complex task and we cannot do it alone. To achieve the priorities reflected within the FY 2021 President's Budget, we will continue to engage with industry and stakeholders, invest resources in our employees, and encourage the public to be part of the solution. Finally, through constructive oversight and dialogue, we seek to partner with Congress as we work to secure all modes of transportation.

Chairman Correa, Ranking Member Lesko, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I look forward to your questions.