

Hearing before the Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs, United States Senate – January 18 2007

Testimony of Tim O'Toole, CBE

I shall provide a brief overview of the London Underground's current performance and its security situation with particular reference to July 7 2005 – how we dealt with that incident, how we prepared for such an incident, and what we have done since.

LU has made great strides in the past four years. We are carrying record numbers of passengers - nearly 4m journeys on one day in December and well over a billion journeys annually – and delivering more train kilometres than ever before. We are the oldest Underground subway in the world, and that distinction is our charm and our burden. We are determined to bring the system into the 21st Century supporting London's continuing growth. As a consequence, the system is undergoing the biggest transformation in its history, with a massive rebuilding and change programme. Yet customer satisfaction is also at an all time high. That is largely down to the professionalism and commitment of management and staff, which in turn stems from their training and experience.

It is those factors which were also at the root of the Tube's ability to withstand and very rapidly recover from the attacks of July 7 2005. Also vital was the multi-agency planning that was put in place following September 11 by the UK Government, supported by the Mayor of London. LU was fully involved in

that planning, with a senior manager seconded to the London Resilience team since it was established, to ensure that the operational realities of a mass transport metro system can be properly considered in political and investment decisions.

This team has led work in areas of planning such as evacuation of parts of London, response to chemical, biological and radiological attacks, and most visibly has arranged tabletop and live emergency exercises to test preparedness for such attacks. The largest of these was a weekend exercise at Bank London Underground Station which simulated a chemical attack at one of the largest, most complex stations on the network. This was a multi-agency exercise which was also attended by political leaders. This is in addition to the regular exercises that we hold with our own and emergency services staff to test our readiness for a wide variety of operational emergency situations. The learning from all these exercises played a vital role for Underground senior managers in revising training and in their own actions on July 7.

The training that all staff receive is in my view the most important factor in dealing with emergency situations. Our ability on July 7 to evacuate around a quarter of a million people from the network within an hour, without injury, is testimony to that. As is the restoration of services by the following morning. Our experience teaches us that you must invest in your staff and rely on them; you must investigate and invest in technology but don't rely on it. The professionalism and competence of our staff made the difference on the day.

In terms of what can be done to secure mass transit systems, we are in a very different position to some other forms of transport. One has only to buy a ticket to secure largely unrestrained access to the public areas of the system – 500 trains, 275 stations – along with millions of fellow passengers. The phenomenon of the suicide bomber is one where conventional responses will not be enough.

But we have a number of ways of controlling the risk that having an open access system creates. CCTV is vital to managing security on the Underground. In July 2005 we already had over 6,000 cameras, covering nearly all stations and some of our trains. The number is ever increasing as part of the transformation of the system, and will reach 12,000 cameras within 5 years. The quality of the equipment is also being upgraded where necessary.

Work is also in place to monitor areas that are not effectively monitored at the moment, such as ventilation shafts, more monitoring of car parks and other potential entry points to the network; 6.3 million pounds is being spent on such investment.

The Tube network is policed by a dedicated Transport Police force comprising nearly 700 police officers, the numbers having increased significantly in recent years thanks to additional funding for the force from the Mayor of London.

Six thousand front-line station staff are deployed across the Tube's stations. These staff work either on platforms, at ticket barriers or in station control rooms. All trains have a driver in their cab who is in contact by radio with a line control centre.

All LU job applicants have to prove their identity and are subject to a level of criminal conviction checks. In this as with other areas we strictly adhere to the guidance of the UK security services.

We have in conjunction with the UK Government run trials of equipment at a small number of stations to scan and search passengers. It remains our view however that screening and checking of all those who use the Tube on a daily basis is impracticable. But CCTV and policing, together with the vigilance of our own staff, allow us to monitor the system closely. Our passengers also have a vital role to play, and we have encouraged them through information campaigns to be on the look out for, and to report, any suspicious behaviour or unattended items.

Communications between staff, and with the Police, are vital and we are now rolling out a new radio communications network for the Tube, which will link control centres, trains, stations and depots, replacing the existing systems that are less integrated and which have been too prone to failures. The new system is being put into operation on each Underground line once it has passed stringent validation, operational and safety checks.

Although it is worth pointing out, any radio system would be unlikely to remain operable at the site of an explosion with a degree of force as that experienced on 7 July 2005, in London.

Since July 7 we have investigated and implemented a number of other improvements to our resilience, including better first aid kit provision at stations and new safety notices on trains. We have reviewed other emergency equipment in conjunction with the emergency services and other relevant experts.

At the core of our resilience strategy is that we constantly work in close co-operation with the Government, its security services, the Police, Fire and Ambulance services, and other agencies and transport operators. It is that co-operation and co-ordination that enables us to be aware of and respond to changing circumstances. We know that the threat remains high and that we need to do everything we can to combat it, and that we need to be ready to deal with another attack. We believe our greatest defence comes from our rapid response and restoration of service, denying terrorists the chaos and fear that they are seeking and thereby discouraging their return.

