

Testimony of Joseph J. Lhota
Chairman and CEO of the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority
to the
U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine Infrastructure
December 6, 2012, 10:30 a.m.

Good morning, Chairman Lautenberg, Ranking Member Wicker, and other members of the Committee.

Thank you for inviting me to testify on this critically important issue. I'm Joseph Lhota and I am the Chairman and CEO of New York State's Metropolitan Transportation Authority, the largest transportation provider in the country. Every day, the MTA moves eight and a half million people safely and securely to their jobs, their schools, shopping, medical appointments, you name it—we take them there.

Our network includes the New York City Subways and Buses, the Staten Island Railway, the Long Island Rail Road and the Metro-North Railroad, as well as seven vehicular bridges and two tunnels.

Along with the other transportation systems represented on this panel, the MTA is the lifeblood of a \$1.4 trillion regional economy—the largest in the country and making up 11 percent of the nation's GDP.

But just over a month ago, Hurricane Sandy brought our system to its knees. We experienced a level of destruction that is completely unprecedented in our 108-year history.

Left in the storm's wake were eight subway tunnels and two vehicular tunnels that were flooded, some completely from floor to ceiling; 12 subway stations with major damage or completely destroyed; we lost an entire bridge and rail line serving the a critical subway line serving the Rockaways in Queens; 15 miles of damaged or destroyed signaling; rail yards and maintenance shops under-water and damaged—all adding up to billions and billions of dollars in damages.

Just as this superstorm was unprecedented, so was the level of our preparation. We knew it was going to be bad and we prepared for the worst. Under the leadership of New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, we shut down the entire system for just the second time in our 108-year history—suspending service on each of our five operating agencies, and closing our two tunnels and all seven of our bridges.

As it turned out, even all our preparations would not—could not—have protected our system from the full force of Sandy's wrath. At the height of the superstorm's surge, Governor Cuomo and I met at the Hugh L. Carey Brooklyn Battery Tunnel in Lower Manhattan, and what we saw there was truly unbelievable. We watched as more than 86 million gallons of seawater flooded the two tubes of that tunnel alone.

Once Hurricane Sandy passed, our top priority was to restore service as quickly and as safely possible. And I have to say this, I simply could not be more proud of the MTA labor and management and how they handled the storm.

Even before the superstorm was over, they were out there repairing the system. We had buses up-and-running seven hours after the storm. Only nine hours after that, buses were running full-schedule. A few of our commuter trains were running less than 24 hours after the storm passed. Limited subway service was back 36 hours after the storm.

Due to the complete loss of the flooded tunnels under the East River, subway service between Brooklyn and Manhattan was at a complete halt. So for three days, we had to improvise. We used 330 buses from our existing bus fleet to replace service for the 1.4 million customers who commute from Brooklyn to Manhattan every day.

Some people chose to drive during this time and as a result, New York City was completely gridlocked - - inundated with cars. When our network is running at full strength, it is estimated that the MTA keeps approximately 700,000 cars from entering New York City's Central Business District every day. And with our transit system crippled, cars didn't just "block the box." They blocked the entire island of Manhattan.

Once our tunnels were cleared and power was restored, most service was restored within a week. And today, most of our transit system is up-and-running.

But let me be clear: While we have restored service, we are nowhere close to normal operations and won't be for quite some time. It's important to remember that hundreds of millions of gallons of salt water completely inundated a system that's over 100 years old. We will be feeling the residual effect of this storm for months, if not years to come.

In our efforts to restore service, we used over 80 percent of our inventory of equipment, nearly exhausting all of our replacement supplies. South Ferry/Whitehall Station, which is a critical stop for those riders coming from Staten Island, as well as those riders that work near Wall Street, was completely destroyed. The subway line, along with the bridge, connecting the Rockaways Peninsula and the rest of Queens is just gone. The subway tunnel for the R train connecting Brooklyn and Manhattan still isn't operational. We have subway lines running at slower headways, resulting in longer commutes and severe crowding.

Nearly half a million of our customers either have no service, reduced service, or have to take alternative routes. To put that in perspective, that's equal to the entire populations of the cities of Miami, Cleveland, Atlanta, or Pittsburgh having no transportation or having their commute become significantly longer.

While our preparations and quick recovery helped to limit the impact of the storm, our preliminary estimates total nearly \$5 billion in damages and this figure could rise. As you know, salt water and metal, and salt water and electronic devices, don't mix very well. After marinating for weeks, the useful life for many of our signals, switches and relays have depleted exponentially. But this figure represents just what we need to get the system back to where it was the day before the storm. Over and above that, it's critical that we make the critical investments we need to protect our system from future storms.

As President Obama has said, we must and we will rebuild. New Yorkers are resilient and we always bounce back. When you consider the fact that the New York metropolitan region completely shuts down without the MTA ... and that the region makes up a full 11 percent of our entire nation's GDP, this is clearly much more than a New York story, or a New York need. This is a national issue. A national need. And we're going to need the federal government's help to rebuild.

Once again, Chairman Lautenberg, thank you for holding this important hearing and for giving me the opportunity to testify before the committee. I welcome any questions you may have.