

STATEMENT OF
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before the

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES SENATE
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I am Vincent Pearce, National Response Program Manager at the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), responsible for DOT's activities under the National Response Plan, which primarily consists of Emergency Support Function 1 – Transportation (ESF-1).

I deployed to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) National Response Coordination Center (NRCC) on August 30, 2005 to lead the Department's efforts, having spent the prior three days in the DOT Crisis Management Center as part of DOT's crisis response team. I worked from the NRCC continuously through Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

The Department of Transportation's primary ESF-1 role is providing trucks to move relief supplies to the affected areas, and to provide buses as a transport provider of last resort, if local and State efforts are overwhelmed. Under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, DOT can only act in response to a direct "tasking" from FEMA, for both trucks and busses, after that agency receives a request for assistance from the state and the state certifies that it is beyond its capability to perform or contract for the needed assistance. DOT received its first tasking for buses at 1:45 AM on August 31, 2005 the night after Katrina landfall. By day's end we had provided 200 buses to the designated staging areas to support the evacuation of the New Orleans area, much of which was inaccessible by land at that time due to flooding. Another 200+ buses were en route.

To put the enormous scale of this effort into context, starting from scratch, within a few days DOT contracted over 1100 buses and drivers – equivalent to the largest national commercial bus fleet – to assist the evacuation. These buses carried an estimated 218,000 evacuees out of the Hurricane-ravaged areas, while trucks hauled in 16,000 truck loads of relief equipment, supplies, and housing.

Under ESF-1, the Department of Transportation was also the federal agency responsible for restoring operations at Louis Armstrong Airport in New Orleans, and other local airports. On September 1, 2005 the Federal Aviation Administration had teams of specialists and equipment on site. The next day, the air evacuation began. Under incredibly taxing conditions, DOT coordinated the largest civilian air evacuation ever conducted within the United States. With strong assistance from the Air Transport Association and commercial air carriers, and support from the Department of Defense, the Transportation Security Administration, FEMA, and State

and local officials over 25,000 people were evacuated on 132 flights, to destinations as far away as Battle Creek, Michigan.

Members of the committee will be aware of many of DOT's other actions, from the approximately 43,000 pages of documents DOT has provided, at the committee's request, detailing our involvement in Katrina. The Department helped avoid a shut-down of fuel to the mid-Atlantic states by working to restore operations to key pipelines. DOT's Maritime Administration provided Ready Reserve Force ships to provide power, communications, command-and-control and floating housing at the affected ports. And since the hurricane passed, DOT has worked with local officials to rapidly repair roads and bridges, re-establish transit service in New Orleans, and set up an interim transit service to meet the increased needs of Baton Rouge.

Before Katrina struck, the team of DOT and contractor personnel was "leaning forward in the saddle." On August 27, 2005 the Evacuation Liaison Team began coordinating frequent calls between DOT, FEMA, the National Hurricane Center, and State officials to discuss the pre-Katrina evacuation on the highways.

On August 28, 2005 DOT staff at the NRCC called DOT's Emergency Transportation Center to advise them to plan for the possibility of needing 500 buses to assist in a post-landfall evacuation. The Center notified DOT's transportation services contractor Landstar Express America, which began exploring possible sources for vehicles and drivers.

At 12:30 AM on August 31, 2005 we received verbal notification from FEMA that they would be tasking us to provide 455 buses (a figure that eventually grew to a peak of 1105 several days later) for the evacuation of the Superdome; authorization to proceed arrived at 1:45 AM. At 5:25 AM, FEMA tasked the Department of Defense to provide "command and control for all evacuation in the New Orleans area and lower LA affected parishes." As each bus that Landstar secured arrived in the designated staging areas, control was transferred from DOT to DOD.

By 1:00 PM on August 31, 2005, DOT had a professional fleet management contractor onsite at the first staging area designated by the Louisiana State Patrol and the Louisiana National Guard. Roughly 20 buses were already onsite. By midnight some 200 buses had arrived and were ready for operation, having already outgrown two staging areas and moved to a third. Over 200 additional buses were already contracted and en-route. By September 5, 2005 DOT had contracted for over 1100 vehicles.

On September 1st, DOT already had 44 personnel deployed to 16 locations carrying out the ESF-1 disaster response mission. DOT eventually deployed over 200 personnel to carry out the ESF-1 mission, and hundreds more DOT employees in response to FEMA's call for volunteers.

The National Response Plan designates DOT as the ESF-1 coordinator to provide transportation support to FEMA. Task-by-task contracting efforts proved in the past to be labor intensive and inefficient. In 2002, DOT awarded a contract to Landstar Express America to cover a broad range of emergency transportation needs. In its first major test, during the series of four Hurricanes that hit Florida in 2004, the contract proved to be efficient and effective. Following

Katrina, the DOT Inspector General conducted a review of internal controls over the Landstar contract and reported that: “The circumstances surrounding that disaster were both dire and extraordinary, and FAA Southern Region management and the contractor provided an unprecedented response to the crisis as it unfolded.”

Nevertheless, DOT is participating in a review across the Federal Government to determine how to do better. While this committee and others undertake the important work of identifying problems and fixes, I hope you also take the time to recognize what went right. The drivers, dispatchers and other employees of Landstar are among the unsung heroes of Katrina. In a chaotic environment, they brought thousands of buses and trucks when and where they were asked to. They have earned the thanks and appreciation of the Department of Transportation and, we hope, yours as well.