

# Security beyond the ports



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**T**he controversial P&O-DP World deal will likely initiate a new round of transportation security introspection and analysis. It also should provide an opportunity to recognize the interconnected, intermodal nature of our transportation system and present a chance to correct the imbalance in today's transportation security policy emphasizing airport-airline passenger security at the relative expense of the other modes.

If we resist the temptation to make ports the sole focus of the upcoming security review and recognize the intermodal nature of our transport system, we may yet have an opportunity to get it right.

Port security is indeed crucial to the U.S. But port activity represents only one link in our global supply chains. It is unlikely that foreign-based terrorists would plan to detonate or activate a device in one of the thousands of containers that arrive at our ports daily. Far richer terror targets lie inland via the wide open and vulnerable surface modes. Furthermore, equal or greater commercial disruption can be accomplished at inland transport choke points.

The exposed nature of the inland modes, with virtually uncountable combinations of highway access routes and more than 170,000 unguarded track miles, provides challenges at least as troublesome as the need to effectively screen or examine the ever-growing number of containers moving through our ports. Focusing on port security alone without considering the ultimate delivery modes would continue the Department of Homeland Security's piecemeal approach.

A more effective program should recognize the need for railroads and truckers to join with port interests and the government to combine and coordinate efforts to face a common threat.

In the absence of a comprehensive DHS mandate for an intermodal approach to security, the surface modes, like port interests, are going their own ways to combat perceived threats.

For instance, the trucking industry realizes its capability to provide terrorists direct access to an array of targets of opportunity and has developed an Anti-Terrorist Action Plan. Among other things, the program expands the industry's Highway Watch program that trains drivers and truck stop operators to spot and report suspicious activities, improves data sharing between truckers and government security officers, and promotes the establishment of responsive strategies. The industry also is sponsoring technology initiatives, including electronic fences, remote truck-locking mechanisms and unhitched trailer-tracking devices.

The emphasis in the rail industry is similar. The extensive U.S. rail network is not as redundant and resistant to terrorist disruption as an examination of a railroad map might suggest. Following the industry's sweeping corporate realignments brought about by the mergers of the 1980s and 1990s, the rail industry has largely channeled its traffic to its favored high-density lines. While this improves operating efficiency dramatically, it comes at a high cost: These newly dense traffic corridors are now approaching capacity limits.

The ports feel the direct effects of

this new reality. The congestion problems of the past couple years is indicative of the rail system's fragility when volume approaches capacity. A terrorist attack at any choke point on today's tightly stretched rail system would have immediate adverse impact on domestic and international commerce.

The rail industry is acutely aware of its vulnerability. Soon after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, the Association of American Railroads established anti-terror policies for five critical action categories. Intermodal traffic protection, however, was not one of them. The railroads' efforts, like those of truckers, remain largely industry-focused and -funded.

The individual modes have no excuse for failing to recognize that the DHS's piecemeal approach to transportation security is increasingly out of touch with industrial reality. The expected focus on port vulnerabilities should not be a blinder to wider appreciation of system vulnerability. Perhaps the modes' biggest challenge will be to rise above individual interests and present an argument for an intermodal security approach before Congress and the DHS.

America's global supply chains do not begin and end at the ports. Neither should our security focus.

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