

Chairwoman Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX)
Subcommittee on Transportation Security and Infrastructure Protection
Committee on Homeland Security
Opening Statement, as prepared

“The Future of the Registered Traveler Program”

2:00 P.M. on Wednesday, September 30, 2009 – 311 Cannon House Office Building

Before I provide some thoughts and background on the issue at hand, I want to make several items clear. First, notwithstanding our work over the past several months, we are still trying to acquire information about what RT will look like going forward.

Second, we are eager to work with the incoming TSA Administrator, the recently nominated Erroll Southers, to develop an RT program that works for everyone.

Third, we are not here today to promote any single service provider. Instead, we want to hear from providers about the development of a business solution that will ensure that future RT subscribers are not deprived of the services for which they have paid.

That is what happened this summer. Clear failed its customers and other RT providers, such as Flo, failed their customers because they were too reliant on Clear. Today, this panel will lay a marker for all stakeholders as the process for resuscitating RT moves forward, and we expect to remain an integral part of the ongoing RT dialogue.

In the Aviation and Transportation Security Act, Congress encouraged TSA to implement a “trusted passenger” program through which the Administrator could establish expedited security screening procedures for passengers who were vetted through background checks and deemed to be a low security risk.

As envisioned by Congress, the security benefit to such a program was clear: TSA could focus precious resources on higher-risk, “unknown” passengers and potentially test new screening technologies on these known travelers.

To carry out its duties under ATSA, TSA worked with industry to establish technical and interoperability standards for service providers, such as Clear. However, after these initial actions, TSA stopped conducting security threat assessments and criminal history background checks on participating RT passengers. Without these threat assessments to determine lower-risk passengers, TSA effectively rendered this risk-based security program impotent. Lacking the security threat assessment component, critics called RT a “head-of-the-line” program.

Nevertheless, even without an expedited security screening aspect, we now understand that several firms are interested in re-establishing RT operations at airports. Regardless of whether RT eventually functions as a true, risk-based security program, it appears that the private sector is poised to engage in this market.

In light of these developments, I would like to make two comments. First, I hope that TSA is responsive to Congress’ request, as outlined in H.R. 2200, that it make a good-faith effort to explore a security benefit for RT.

Second, I strongly encourage the private sector to create an RT model that can support a security benefit, but which does not rely on one. This will protect consumers.

We have much to discuss today, including what the role of TSA should be in any future RT program and whether the program can be leveraged or adapted to follow a risk-management approach to security screening. We also need to understand if the program will benefit customers, as the traveling public cannot afford to endure the events of this summer a second time.

This hearing provides us with a forum to articulate our concerns about RT and discuss ideas for the path ahead. I am looking forward to our discussion this afternoon.