

Bag Check by Dan Jacoby

In response to the two rounds of bombings in the London underground (what we call the subway), New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg has decided to appear, at least to be taking a tough stand. His solution? Have police at subway stations randomly check some passengers' bags before they enter the system.

Putting constitutional issues aside (for now), there's a practical problem.

There are 468 subway stations, all but two open 24/7. Figure two cops per station (because one cop alone can't both check a bag and watch for other people to stop at the same time), and four shifts (to cover the 168 hours in a week), that means over 3,700 cops doing bag check.

But wait ... there's more!

There are always police out on vacation or sick leave, doing paperwork to support the cops in the field, responding to calls (if they arrest someone, that means more police to take them to the station), etc. Additionally, many stations have more than one set of turnstiles, meaning more sets of cops having to work. Finally, they'll need some "rotating teams" to fill in for those police on a meal break. Add it up, and the total jumps to ... well, I don't know, but let's say conservatively well over 6,000.

There are, according to the NYPD website, just over 39,000 police on the force right now. Expanding this by 6,000 is out of the question. How much will it cost, and where will the money come from? How long will it take to recruit and train 6,000 additional cops? Taking 6,000 cops off other beats permanently in order to check bags at subway stations is also not going to happen -- are we going to let major crime numbers soar because cops are busy looking into people's luggage? Fuggedaboutit! What will happen instead is that many subway stations simply won't be covered.

And that leaves a hole big enough to bring terrorist bombs in.

Say a team of four terrorists, stationed at four successive stations along a line (like the R in Queens, or the 6 in the Bronx) with cell phones. One of them sees that his station is unmanned. Fifteen minutes later, four terrorists with bombs are in the system. Now, they can go anywhere they want, and wait for the appointed hour to set off their bombs.

In other words, this entire project is a complete waste of time, money, and -- oh yes -- our freedom!

Since the plan can't possibly stop any terrorists from bringing bombs into the subway system and setting them off, and since it is, at the very least, an expensive inconvenience, only someone unfamiliar with the numbers, a corrupt or cowardly politician, or a complete idiot would support it. Michael Bloomberg is certainly not unfamiliar with the numbers, and he's just as certainly not a complete idiot. Guess what that leaves? That's right, corruption and cowardice!

We can take a stand for intelligent, competent, thoughtful reactions. We can let people know that this plan is absolutely worthless. We can get the word out that Mayor Bloomberg has no solution and no clue -- and would rather waste our time, our money and our freedom than admit he's clueless.

Then we'll get into the constitutional issues.