

Interview with Pat Foye

## ***In preparing for disasters, don't fight the last war***

*Pat Foye is executive director of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which oversees infrastructure within New York City's five boroughs as well as four suburban counties in addition to eight counties in northern New Jersey. The Port Authority also manages the One World Trade building, completed in 2013, which anchors the new World Trade Center complex.*

*The Port Authority's infrastructure—airports; rail and bus transit; tunnels and bridges; and marine terminals—serves some 17 million people who live and work in New York and New Jersey. In 2012, Superstorm Sandy inflicted some \$2 billion in damages to infrastructure within the Port Authority's jurisdiction.*



***After Superstorm Sandy, service to the three major airports—JFK, LaGuardia, and Newark—resumed fairly quickly. How was the Port Authority able to accomplish that?***

We're proud of what happened at the airports. After Superstorm Sandy, the runways had to be prepped and cleaned. LaGuardia Airport staff conducted massive pumping operations to pump out approximately 100 million gallons of flood water. The amount of water and debris—both large and small—that had to be moved, was substantial. It was a herculean effort and the staff at the airports did an extraordinary job.

Because they were prepared: We had conducted a significant amount of training—from table-top exercises to full-scale drills—months before Superstorm Sandy. We also have significant experience with weather events and fully detailed emergency preparedness plans. So it took an enormous amount of preparation, lots of real-world experience, and very strong, experienced leaders.

***What lessons can we learn from Superstorm Sandy?***

There's a saying among military historians that at the beginning of a new war, the generals are always fighting the last one—oblivious to the fact that the world around them has changed.

Similarly—and this is not an assessment of blame but—over a period of decades, we've had a failure of imagination of sorts. Since the highest storm surge we've ever experienced in the past was six feet high, the planning didn't anticipate much more than that. But Sandy's surge topped out at 14 feet.

We've already added additional resources for the upcoming storm season. We are going through each of our facilities to install flood barriers, concrete bin blocks, and sand-filled barriers to support flood prevention. In total, over 15,000 linear feet of waterproof barriers will be installed across our facilities. In concert, as we work to fully rehabilitate infrastructure, we will raise substations, signaling and switching equipment, and electrical infrastructure everywhere we can.

But we also need to plan for a variety of scenarios. I don't know what the next disaster is going to be. It could be an act of man or an act of nature, but it will be different. One thing we've done at the Port Authority in the drills we've conducted since Superstorm Sandy is to have a mix of hurricane-like scenarios

as well as other scenarios in which there's widespread disruption to the power grid for whatever reason.

### ***How do you modernize the Port Authority while also shoring up aging facilities?***

Most of our assets are on or near the water, they're old, and the climate is clearly more volatile than it used to be. It's much easier to account for the element of resilience when you're building a new facility. The World Trade Center is a pretty good example. On the night of Superstorm Sandy, it was still under construction. Because we had a significant amount of pumping and generation capacity on site, construction resumed in a breathtakingly short period of time after we pumped out the substantial amount of water that had accumulated.

In terms of resilience for existing infrastructure, obviously we're going to have to prioritize. And focus on key pieces of infrastructure. We will concentrate on projects that are already underway or soon-to-be underway. For example, the new Goethals Bridge and work on the Bayonne Bridge; both link New Jersey and New York. And we have to recognize that long-term mitigation is not going to be completed this year. We're going to have to make prioritization decisions across the board.

We're going to be very focused on our airports, given their critical nature to the regional and national economy. Our

regional domestic product in New York and New Jersey amounts to over \$1 trillion dollars so knocking that economy out even for a day or two begins to take a significant toll, not only on local and state governments, but also on the national economy. Our airports must also recover quickly after a disaster because they play an essential role in receiving supplies flown in by civilian relief agencies and the military.

### ***What role can the private sector play in designing and building resilient infrastructure?***

The private sector has a great deal to contribute in partnerships with the public sector—not only in terms of ideas and intellectual capital but also in terms of financial capital. How best to finance public-private partnerships is a challenge that faces our region and the nation. The private sector can help public-sector organizations choose the best form of financing to meet the commitments and expectations of both parties.

We've already used the public-private partnership procurement model for the new Goethals Bridge and the new central terminal building at LaGuardia. We will also pursue it as an option on Terminal A at Newark Airport. And the involvement of the privately held Durst Organization as a minority equity holder for the construction of the new One World Trade Center has also worked out well for the Port Authority.

Although private capital is not the best solution for every project, we will look at private financing as an alternative for any project when it seems to make sense

### ***What concerns you most in your role as executive director of the Port Authority?***

When something happens anywhere in the world—whether it's in Beijing or Paris or Connecticut, whether it's a terrible storm or a derailment or an act of terrorism—it's an issue for us. We want to know what happened, how the affected agencies responded, what the copycat consequences might be if it was an act of terrorism, and what lessons we can learn.

The next challenge this region faces will be different from Superstorm Sandy; we can't fall into the military trap of fighting the last war, or in our case, the previous storm. The challenge will be different, the consequences will be different, and the way we respond to it will be different. We have to be prepared for any eventuality.