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From: Morning Transportation
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Subject: POLITICO's Morning Transportation: Al Qaeda threatens U.S. rail — Kelly focuses Trump's policy agenda — NTSB investigates Charlottesville helicopter crash

By Stephanie Beasley and Brianna Gurciullo | 08/14/2017 10:00 AM EDT

EMERGING RAIL/TRANSIT THREAT: Al Qaeda is encouraging its terrorist followers to target the U.S. rail and transit system, according to the Middle East Media Research Institute. The group, which monitors Middle Eastern publications, said the latest issue of Al Qaeda's Inspire Magazine - released in English and Arabic - includes several articles urging followers to attack public transportation systems in the United States to undermine public security and cause economic harm. "It also lists some of the main passenger train lines across the country, such as the Washington DC-Boston Acela Express, the Amtrak Cascades, the Empire Builder from Chicago to the Pacific Northwest, the Coast Starlight, etc., with a map," MEMRI said in a statement released Sunday. MEMRI further noted that at least one of the articles appeared to have been written before President Donald Trump took office in January. TSA did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Heavy load: This latest threat to U.S. transportation emerges just days after David Pekoske took over the top spot at TSA. During a June 21 nomination hearing, Sen. [Cory Booker](#) (D-N.J.) pressed Pekoske to prioritize modes other than aviation and specifically to implement a 9/11 Commission report recommendation to develop a more coordinated surface transportation security plan focusing on rail safety. "If confirmed, I would put a lot of effort in TSA into looking at the intelligence around the rail threat, in particular," Pekoske responded. "TSA has an exceptional intelligence and analysis operation. It's very well-coordinated with the intelligence community overall. And from my perspective, the intelligence community has done a very good job of keeping Americans safe."

WELCOME TO MONDAY: Thanks for tuning in to POLITICO's Morning Transportation, your daily tipsheet on all things trains, planes, automobiles and ports. Don't forget to send tips, feedback, lyrics and your "Game of Thrones" reactions to sbeasley@politico.com or @Steph_Beasley and bgurciullo@politico.com or [@brigurciullo](https://twitter.com/brigurciullo).

"He said, 'Son, how long you been drivin' this rig? / You know I drove all shapes, forms, fashions and kinds / Here you are worried about this one little trip / Why, I drove a million miles and then some.'" (Matt Barron at MLB Research Associates)

GET LISTENING: Follow MT's [playlist](#) on Spotify. What better way to start your day than with songs (picked by us and readers) that are all about flying, driving, commuting and sailing?

TWEET DU JOUR: "Nobody likes being regulated, but everything (cars, planes, food, drugs, etc) that's a danger to the public is regulated. AI should be too." - [@elonmusk](https://twitter.com/elonmusk).

FALLING IN LINE: President Donald Trump is scheduled to lead an infrastructure discussion on Tuesday, and aides say they hope he'll have a better idea of how to proceed on that and other

issues after meetings in New York this week. While Trump mans that ship publicly, White House chief of staff John Kelly is quietly working behind the scenes to change the administration's policy operations to ensure Trump's "ambitious fall policy drive" - including an infrastructure package, a tax overhaul and possibly health care - actually gets off the ground, POLITICO's Nancy Cook [reports](#). "Since arriving two weeks ago, Kelly has instructed White House aides to stay in their lanes and tackle policies only within their portfolios," Cook writes.

High hopes: But White House staffers and Republicans outside the administration say they are worried that despite Kelly's best efforts to rein in the chaos in the Oval Office, he still hasn't managed to stop Trump's policymaking via tweets. TIME Magazine recently [declared](#) Kelly "Trump's last hope," and we'll be watching to see if he can finally get the ball rolling on that infrastructure package.

And speaking of infrastructure plans: Texas Central announced today that it has hired Fluor Corp. and Lane Construction to help design and engineer a high-speed rail line between Dallas and Houston. Construction for the project should begin soon, a spokesman for the companies said.

SEE, WHAT HAD HAPPENED WAS ...: Customs and Border Protection has spent more than \$5 million on polygraph tests for applicants whose backgrounds disqualified them as eligible hires. An IG report found that 20 percent of the 380 polygraph exams CBP administered from fiscal 2013 to 2016 was given to applicants who had already disclosed criminal behavior or drug use, which would knock them out of the hiring pool, our Mary Lee [writes](#). The new findings come as CBP faces a hiring shortage that officials have connected to the challenge of finding qualified applicants who can pass the polygraph requirement. The agency is also facing pressure from the White House to hire 5,000 additional Border Patrol agents.

Get it together: The IG had two recommendations for CBP: interview applicants before giving polygraph exams, and make sure adjudicators flag disqualified applicants before they reach examiners. The Department of Homeland Security has said it is also considering exempting military veterans and some law enforcement officers from the polygraph requirement to help grow its pool of eligible applicants.

NTSB INVESTIGATING CHARLOTTESVILLE HELICOPTER ACCIDENT: NTSB launched an [investigation](#) into the crash of a Virginia State Police helicopter that [left](#) two policemen dead on Saturday near Charlottesville, Va. NTSB's Peter Knudson told MT that the crash of the Bell 407 was in a wooded area, and some parts of the helicopter were in the trees. A fire occurred after the crash, Knudson said. Investigators will focus today on retrieving all the parts to document and examine them.

LIFE IN THE SLOW LANE: Almost 150 of Trump's nominees have yet to be confirmed by the Senate, POLITICO's Elana Schor [reports](#). By contrast, "President Barack Obama had 115 nonjudicial civilian nominees still waiting for Senate confirmation by Aug. 7 in his first term, while Bill Clinton had 87 and George H.W. Bush had 104," Elana writes, citing the Partnership for Public Service. As Elana notes, Sen. [Tammy Duckworth](#) (D-Ill.) put a hold on one of DOT's nominees: Steven Bradbury, chosen to be the agency's general counsel.

SHAKE IT UP: Amtrak has hired AECOM and Network Rail to review its repair work at Penn Station for an undisclosed sum, Dana Rubinstein reports for POLITICO Pro New York. The consultancies will examine daily management operations and ways to improve them through better coordination within the station. Former MTA CEO Tom Prendergast had been in charge of the review but decided to step down in July because of conflicts related to his previous post with MTA Long Island Rail Road.

KEEP DOIN' WHAT YOU'RE DOIN': The Association of American Railroads and GoRail are giving their Railroad Achievement Award to Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-Ore.) today. The groups said recipients of the award recognize "the need for safe and efficient operations made possible through sustained investment." Sens. John Thune (R-S.D.) and Bill Nelson (D-Fla.) received the award earlier this year.

SHIFTING GEARS: Margaret Anne Moore is now the House Homeland Security Committee's communications director, per Playbook Power Briefing. She was previously broadcast communications adviser to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.). ... And Playbook reports that Leacy Burke is joining Sen. Jim Inhofe's (R-Okla.) office as communications director after serving in the same role for Rep. Joe Wilson (R-S.C.).

THE AUTOBAHN:

- "Read the letter Uber shareholders sent Benchmark asking the firm to step down from the company's board." Fortune.
- "A glorious infographic of North America's transit fleets." City Lab.
- "Texas scraps some toll roads while other states add more." The Associated Press.
- "America's buses lose riders, imperiling their future." The Wall Street Journal.
- "For electric cars to take off, they'll need place to charge." The Associated Press.
- "Pushing for a commute that would rise above the rest." The New York Times.
- "Amtrak's eclipse train in Illinois sells out in 22 hours." The Associated Press.

THE COUNTDOWN: DOT appropriations run out in 47 days. The FAA reauthorization expires in 47 days. Highway and transit policy is up for renewal in 1,143 days.

To view online:

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