



Security Planning for the 2004 Democratic National Convention (A)

When the Democratic National Committee announced, in November 2002, that it had selected Boston, Massachusetts, to host its July 2004 convention, the city's leaders and political allies jubilantly hailed their hard-fought victory. Boston had beaten out much larger cities, including New York (later chosen as the site for the Republican National Convention), Miami, and Detroit, to win the convention, which would formally nominate the Democratic challenger to President George W. Bush in the upcoming 2004 election. The city hoped to reap significant economic benefits from the many thousands expected to gather for the event, and to showcase its historical and contemporary attractions to a large national and international television audience. It was little wonder that the city's popular Democratic mayor, Thomas Menino, who had long sought to bring the convention to Boston, was likened in the press to the proverbial "grinning ... cat that had swallowed the canary" when news of the award was made public.¹

But the city's joy would soon be tempered by the somber realities of hosting the first major political event in the US since the September 11 terrorist attacks. Nominating conventions had long been a magnet for a range of domestic protesters, many of them seeking to disrupt the proceedings, but they were now also seen as a possible target for terrorist groups eager to capitalize on the opportunity to attack an important symbol of the nation's democratic process. In these more threatening times, the task of devising a comprehensive security plan that would protect conventioners was a daunting—and expensive—one, with no exact precedent to act as guide. The city could, however, draw on a major source of experience and expertise: the US Secret Service. It sought to have the Department of Homeland Security designate the convention a

¹ Scot Lehigh, "Is this the start of a new Boston attitude?" *The Boston Globe*, November 15, 2002, p. A19.

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"National Special Security Event," thereby giving that agency lead responsibility for security planning.

Thus it was that Secret Service Special Agent Scott Sheafe arrived in Boston in June 2003 to take on the role of "coordinator" of security arrangements for the Democratic National Convention (DNC), still a little over a year away. To do his job, he would need to enlist the cooperation and participation of over thirty federal, state, and local agencies, as well as the support of city and state political leaders. Under any circumstances, this would be demanding work, but the convention site—the FleetCenter, a sports and entertainment facility—posed special challenges. It was situated directly over a busy public transit station and right next to a key interstate highway; it was bordered by a bustling commercial district and close to the city's harbor and downtown. From a security point of view, the FleetCenter was, in Sheafe's words, "a very sick patient,"² and the medicine he would prescribe to make it well would be harsh. It would be Sheafe's task not only to prescribe, but to convince the patient to take the medicine.

Background: The DNC Comes to Boston

It was no secret that Mayor Menino—who would mark his tenth year in office in 2003—ardently wished to bring the Democratic National Convention to Boston. The city had bid for the 2000 convention and lost out to Los Angeles; on its second try, with the help of Senator Edward Kennedy and other members of the state's congressional delegation, its determined efforts paid off. "I think that in the end," Kennedy joked at a press conference on November 13 to announce the winning bid, "[the site selection committee] understood that no city wanted it more than Boston did."³ The convention, notes Julie Burns, a former deputy chief of staff for Menino and organizer of the city's 2004 bid for the DNC, was not in itself "a large event." Only about 35,000 were expected to attend the four-day gathering in July 2004—a trifling figure compared to the hundreds of thousands that turned out for the Patriots' Super Bowl parade or to view the Tall Ships in Boston Harbor—but roughly 15,000 of that number would be members of the press. "You've got 15,000 members of the media in your city," Burns points out, "for somewhere between six days and two to three weeks, because the planners come early; so in that sense, it's just an incredible opportunity to highlight your city."

For Mayor Menino, the media spotlight would allow the world to learn not only about Boston's rich historical past, but its dynamic present—to see it, he says, "as an older city that works." Moreover, he adds, "I saw [the convention] as a challenge for Boston. We'd never had an event of this magnitude." He was confident the city would meet the challenge, and fare better than

² Sarah D. Scalet, "Is this any place to hold a convention?" CSO Magazine, September 2004. Online at <http://www.csoonline.com/read/090104/convention.html>.

³ Glen Johnson, "Convention City: Democrats select Boston for '04 with nod to history," *The Boston Globe*, November 14, 2002, p. A1.

others that had hosted political conventions in the past, because he had the backing of the Chamber of Commerce and other civic and business groups. "It wasn't just the mayor saying I want the convention in Boston," he notes. Finally, the convention was expected to bring business to the city in the short-term—organizers had estimated that the event would pump \$154 million into the local economy—and attract investment in the long-term. The award of the DNC was greeted with nearly universal acclaim. "There is a delirium," said US Rep. Edward Markey at the November 13 press conference, "that is breaking out at every Dunkin' Donuts shop across the state of Massachusetts that would be hard to capture."⁴

Getting Organized. Once the long-sought prize was won, the huge job of planning for the DNC—which would take place from July 26-29, 2004—quickly got underway. Overall responsibility for organizing the event fell to "Boston 2004," the convention's host committee, headed by two former Menino aides: David Passafaro, the committee's president, and Julie Burns, its executive director. Among other things, the contract signed by the host committee required it to recruit and train a volunteer force of 8,000; provide transportation for delegates and dignitaries; and arrange for a number of auxiliary events, including hosting a party for the 15,000 media representatives and finding venues throughout the city for numerous convention-related activities. Perhaps most critically, the committee was responsible for raising the \$49.5 million that the city had budgeted for the convention in its bid.⁵ Even as the city basked in the glow of its victory, questions arose as to whether this sum would cover the costs of the convention and, in particular, an item that loomed increasingly large in importance: security.

The Security Issue. Boston had submitted its proposal for the DNC in April 2001. Its bid package, Burns notes, included a section on security, detailing the city's "ability to deal with large-scale protests, ability to deal with political events, dignitary protection. ... It was not at all focused on anti-terrorism." But by the time Boston's bid was accepted, September 11 had happened, and concerns about a terrorist attack cast a long shadow over the coming presidential race. Such concerns moved security to the front of the line of issues demanding the attention of the host committee. "Security was [only] one of the things we thought of" in preparing the bid, Burns says. "Post-9/11, it was the first thing."

The city had budgeted \$10 million for security in its winning bid. Even without the added worry of a terrorist attack, that figure had seemed low to some: Los Angeles, which had hosted the 2000 DNC, had spent over twice that amount to handle massive demonstrations around the convention center there.⁶ After September 11, there was general agreement that the need to protect

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ The host committee expected the majority of funds to come from private donors, but hoped to secure \$17.5 million from public sources, either in cash or in-kind services.

⁶ Ralph Ranalli, "Critics say \$10M budget not enough to protect convention," *The Boston Globe*, November 14, 2002, p. A29; Yvonne Abraham, "DNC has price tags, details galore for '04," *The Boston Globe*, December 17, 2002, p. A1.

against terrorism would add significantly to the cost—and the complexity—of security planning for the 2004 convention. Cognizant of the new challenges facing it, the host committee moved quickly to avail itself of an important source of help from the federal government by seeking to be designated a National Special Security Event.

The NSSE. The National Special Security Event (NSSE) was created in May 1998 by presidential directive during the Clinton administration in the aftermath of earlier terrorist incidents, such as the first World Trade Center attack and the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City.⁷ Under the terms of the directive, the governor of a state in which an event of “national significance” was planned could request an NSSE designation—after the passage of the Homeland Security Act in 2002, such requests were directed to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Previous NSSEs included, among others, the 1999 World Trade Organization meetings in Seattle, the 2000 Democratic and Republican National Conventions in Los Angeles and Philadelphia respectively, and the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City. The NSSE designation provided no funding, but it did authorize the participation of federal agencies in the security planning process. Specifically, the NSSE stipulated the roles and responsibilities of three federal agencies: the Secret Service, the lead agency for preparing and implementing a security plan; the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the lead for “crisis management,” which included responsibility for preparing for and resolving any crisis that might arise; and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the lead in “consequence management,” which included responsibility for dealing with the aftermath of any incident that might occur.

It was this federal involvement that the Boston 2004 committee eagerly sought. The NSSE “didn’t come with money, which from the city’s perspective was unfortunate,” says Burns, but it did come “with resources,” notably in the form of planning assistance from the Secret Service. “So we were actually very proactive,” she recalls, “working with the governor”—newly elected Republican Mitt Romney—“and with [DHS] Secretary [Tom] Ridge to get our certification early, so that the Secret Service would come on board” early in the planning process. Governor Romney submitted his request to have the Democratic National Convention designated an NSSE in February 2003; three months later, on May 27, Ridge wrote to Romney informing him that his request had been approved. The Secret Service was on its way.

The Secret Service Steps In

The US Secret Service was charged with two missions: one was to investigate counterfeiting and other financial crimes, and the other, better known, was to protect the president, the vice president, their families, and other dignitaries from the US and abroad. The job

⁷ In 1993, Islamic extremists detonated a truck filled with explosives in the underground garage of the North Tower of the World Trade Center, killing six and injuring over 1,000 people. Two years later, Timothy McVeigh parked an explosives-packed truck in front of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City; the resulting explosion killed 168.

of planning the security for an event, as opposed to an individual, as the NSSE directive required it to do, was a novel one for the Secret Service, but, as Steven Ricciardi, special agent in charge of the Secret Service field office in Boston, notes, it was "a good fit" for the agency. "When you're on the president's detail [as Ricciardi had been], you're involved in planning his security, which is a large-type event every time he leaves the White House." Moreover, Ricciardi adds, "when you do presidential security, you cannot ... do it alone. You have to rely on other folks [and their] expertise [in] their jurisdictions." Special Agent Scott Sheafe agrees. "Everyday somewhere there is an advance team from the Secret Service in a city either domestic or foreign that's building a coalition of partners to prepare for a protectee visit." This was precisely the kind of collaborative effort that managing an NSSE required.

In 2003, Sheafe, a 12-year veteran of the Secret Service, was winding up his stint in Washington on the presidential detail and casting about for his next assignment. A GS-13—which Sheafe characterizes as a "journeyman" grade in the Secret Service—and eligible for promotion, he applied for and got the job of coordinator for the DNC in Boston. Once the NSSE designation was made official in late May and Sheafe had taken care of his last responsibilities on the presidential detail—doing the advance work for President Bush's attendance at the G-8 summit of industrial world leaders in Evian, France—he and his family moved to Boston, "a place I've never been to," he notes. "I know no one. But here I am."

The Boston field office—which was staffed by about 50 people and headed by Ricciardi—focused chiefly on financial fraud investigations, although, as Sheafe explains, "if there's a protectee in [the district], they put on their protection hat and get to work." While Ricciardi—who was also new to the Boston office—and his staff would work with Sheafe on the security planning, Sheafe would officially report to the Major Events Division in the agency's headquarters in Washington, DC.⁸

Although Sheafe had worked with Ricciardi earlier on then-First Lady Hillary Clinton's detail, he was otherwise a stranger to the field office and to the city. Ricciardi paired him with Don Anderson, another special agent in the Boston office, to help him learn the lay of the land, but it would be up to Sheafe to establish cooperative relationships with the state and local agencies that would be involved in providing security for the DNC. He was acutely aware of his outsider status. "Boston, I come to find out," Sheafe says, "is a tight-knit community, and [local agencies] I think were very much expecting this coordinator to come from within the [field] office." The Secret Service's decision to assign "somebody from out of town" made sense to Sheafe, "because it gives you a fresh perspective when you don't owe anybody anything. My mandate was clear, and my motives were pure—I wasn't looking to make a career out of Boston. I wasn't looking to get in good with anybody." Still, Sheafe felt that his task had to be handled with some delicacy. "My commitment to [Ricciardi]," he says, "was that I'm not going to embarrass you in your district. I'm

⁸ The Major Events Division was later merged with the agency's Dignitary Protective Division.

going to make sure when I leave here that the wonderful relationship that the Boston field office has with the law enforcement community, both local and state, and the relationship [it has] with [its] federal partners isn't going to be the same—it's going to be better."

The Planning Mechanism. While Sheafe would be starting almost from scratch in Boston, he did have the benefit of a procedure that Secret Service headquarters had established to organize planning for any NSSE, based on the agency's "core strategy" of "forming partnerships" with other law enforcement, security, and public safety agencies.⁹ The procedure called for the establishment of an intergovernmental apparatus that brought together federal, state and local agencies to work cooperatively on security planning and on resolving any issues that arose in the process. Its basic components were a steering committee—a kind of "board of directors," in Sheafe's words—composed of the heads of agencies that would have a role in the NSSE, and subcommittees—co-chaired by a member of the Secret Service and the local police department—whose task would be to devise operational and tactical plans for specific parts of the overall security plan.¹⁰ The membership of the steering committee, as well as the number and make-up of the subcommittees, depended on the type of event, but Sheafe could refer as well to previous NSSEs and his own experience on the presidential detail for ideas. "I can look and see the subcommittees they had for the DNC in 2000," he explains, "and I can see the subcommittees they had for the Olympics. And I know that if I go on an advance for the president, I need support from all these different groups, so it's basically the same model."

The group that Sheafe ultimately settled on for the steering committee encompassed the heads of eleven different agencies, including the commissioners of the Boston Police and Fire Departments, the special agent in charge of the Boston division of the FBI, the superintendent of the Massachusetts State Police, the secretary of the state Executive Office of Public Safety, the director of the regional FEMA office, and the general manager of the FleetCenter.¹¹ (See Exhibit 1 for a complete list of steering committee members.) Having agency leaders on the committee was considered a crucial ingredient to its effectiveness. "The steering committee is not going to work," Sheafe points out, "if you have the designee of the US attorney or the designee of the commissioner of police. We needed to create a body ... that had the players that were going to be involved—the decision-makers. Luckily, in this region everybody was dedicated to seeing this thing work out well. We didn't have to convince anybody that security is important, because this was a post-September 11 event."

Sheafe also put together a roster of "what the subcommittees should be and who should be on them." As was the case with the steering committee, there would be some additions and some

⁹ From the US Secret Service website. Online at <http://www.secretservice.gov/nsse/shtm1>.

¹⁰ There were actually three plans: the Secret Service's, for venue and dignitary protection; the FBI's, for crisis management; and FEMA's, for consequence management. Subcommittee plans were subsumed into whichever of the three was appropriate.

¹¹ Other senior managers of the agencies also sat in on some steering committee meetings.

rearrangements, but the final list comprised 17 subcommittees in all, each with responsibility for an area of security planning, such as venues, transportation and traffic, intelligence and counter-terrorism, and consequence management. (See Exhibit 2 for a complete list of subcommittees.) Each subcommittee would be chaired by a member of the Secret Service (some of whom came up from headquarters in Washington) and a member of the Boston Police Department; a number of subcommittees had one or more additional co-chairs, representatives of agencies that would play a major role in that particular group's work. The size of the subcommittees varied, but some were quite large: the "medical subgroup" of the consequence management subcommittee, for example, had 39 member agencies. Together, the subcommittees would work on creating highly detailed plans that would protect the FleetCenter from an attack of any kind; ensure the safety of delegates and dignitaries as they shuttled from their hotels to events at the FleetCenter and other venues; keep protesters from getting out of hand, while allowing them adequate opportunities to demonstrate; and respond to a range of possible emergencies, including chemical or biological attacks, explosions, fires, or simple human illness.

Building Partnerships. While he was assembling his lists of committee and subcommittee members, Sheafe also sought to introduce himself to key officials whose cooperation would be crucial to the success of his mission. Chief among these was Superintendent Robert Dunford, a respected veteran of the Boston Police Department. While the Secret Service would be responsible for the protection of the actual venue of the convention—the FleetCenter—as well as a handful of individual dignitaries in attendance, the Boston Police would be expected to provide security for the surrounding area and the rest of the city, including dozens of hotels and other sites where delegates and dignitaries would be gathering. Dunford had been chosen by then-Police Commissioner Paul Evans to take charge of security arrangements for the department, and had been hard at work on plans since November 2002. From Sheafe's point of view, the decision to make Dunford the police department's "point person" for the convention "made all the difference in the world." The superintendent, Sheafe notes, had been a police officer for almost 30 years. "I was 33 years old. He had been on the force almost longer than I had been alive. And he was just extremely kind, willing to explain to me the plans that he had established to date; I got the impression from him right away that he was willing to work it as a partnership."

The Steering Committee Meets. In June, Sheafe was ready for the official launch of the planning process. He sent out letters, over the signature of an assistant director from Secret Service headquarters, to the heads of the agencies he had selected, inviting them to the inaugural meeting of the steering committee on June 20, 2003, 13 months before the kickoff of the DNC. When the group convened, Sheafe recalls, "everybody [was] obviously a little bit nervous, [wondering] where the hell is this going to go and who am I and how is this going to be set up." He had given some thought to the seating arrangement, placing Dunford "right next to me," with FBI Special Agent in Charge Ken Kaiser "very, very close as well. I wanted everybody to see that it was my hope that Mr. Kaiser ... and us could build a coalition also," as he had with Dunford.

Steve Ricciardi served as the committee chairman, but he generally let Sheafe set the agenda and guide the meetings. Ricciardi could have taken charge of the meetings himself, Sheafe notes. "I don't think that's the vision that headquarters had, but he could have done it because it is his district and he knows the players and I don't. But he chose to allow me to run the meetings ... and pick issues that I felt were significant in a manner that I thought was appropriate."¹²

At that first meeting, after Ricciardi introduced him to the assembled agency leaders, Sheafe set out the ground rules for the committee and the subcommittees. The steering committee, he told them, would meet every two months at first, more often as the convention drew near; subcommittees would meet according to whatever timeframe worked best for them. Only the co-chairs of the subcommittees, Sheafe said, would report back to the steering committee. "There should be a one-voice policy for each subcommittee, and the co-chairs should be that one voice." The agency representatives delegated to sit as co-chairs, moreover, "should be given the authority to make decisions, because you can't be coming back with every issue to the steering committee, or it is not going to function." He also stressed that "the steering committee needed to be willing to dedicate the time to come to these meetings." When Sheafe finished outlining his goals, the first person to respond, as he recalls, was US Attorney Michael Sullivan. "Basically, what he said was, '... We're fully supportive and we're going to do anything we can to make this work for you.' ... And that really kind of set the [tone], and everybody else went around the table and they all said the same thing."

The Planning Process

Getting Acquainted. As they settled into their novel and complex task, some committee and subcommittee members felt the benefit of having worked together, in some cases for many years, in a relatively small community of law enforcement and public safety agencies. "All of the relationships that we built over time," reflects Richard Serino, chief of Emergency Medical Services in Boston, "and over the years for all these other events ... helped us when we were developing the plan for the DNC. ... So when it comes time for a special event [like the DNC], it's not going to be introductions for the first time; we're not exchanging business cards. ... [We're] on a first-name basis." This was especially true in the law enforcement area, where a Joint Terrorism Task Force—a consortium of about 22 federal, state and local agencies responsible for conducting counter-terrorism investigations—had brought officials into frequent contact with each other. "On the law enforcement side," says Ken Kaiser, special agent in charge of the FBI's Boston division, "we have a daily working relationship."

¹² Later, in March 2004, Ricciardi was named "principal federal official" (PFO) for the convention. The PFO—a new position created by DHS as part of its "National Response Plan"—would, Ricciardi explains, "facilitate any type of federal response that would be needed in the event of a crisis." Once he assumed his new role, he adds, he became less directly involved in the work of the steering committee.

Where that was not the case, the early going could take some adjusting. FEMA, for example, had little experience in working with some of the key participants involved in the security planning effort. It was, says Ken Horak, acting director of FEMA's regional office in Boston, "the first time we have had meaningful interaction with the Secret Service," and, as well, "the first time we were working with a number of city agencies." It took some time to come to an understanding of each other's perspectives and priorities. "We weren't knowledgeable about how the Secret Service handled these events," says FEMA's Mark Gallagher, who was a co-chair of the consequence management subcommittee.

It was, perhaps, the clarity of the Secret Service's role under the NSSE directive that kept any differences that arose from becoming disruptive. "There was no argument about who was in charge," says Carlo Boccia, director of the Mayor's Office of Homeland Security, "because that was designated—the Secret Service was in charge." Many also praised Scott Sheafe for his efforts to keep traditional rivalries and animosities to a minimum. "Quite honestly," says Boccia, who had recently retired from the Drug Enforcement Administration, "most of the difficulty always comes from the law enforcement agencies, because they are always very thin-skinned when it comes to turf. ... But the strategic ability of [Sheafe] really overcame all of those." The FBI and the Secret Service had, for example, long been rivals—not surprising, Sheafe notes, since "you have these two big kids on the block" whose jurisdictions sometimes overlapped. Even before he officially took the reins of DNC security planning in Boston, Sheafe—whose brother was an FBI agent—visited the FBI regional office to make clear that "I thought those days [of rivalry] were gone, that it didn't benefit anyone. ..." His goodwill efforts paid off. "We had no issues with the Secret Service," says Kaiser, "and that doesn't happen all over."

Sheafe himself credited Dunford with helping to lend legitimacy to the Secret Service's role in security planning and implementation for the DNC. He recalls a presentation Dunford made before the steering committee, describing the police department's plan to divide the city into eight zones for security purposes. "[Dunford] says, 'This is Zone A, the FleetCenter. Zone A is under the complete control and discretion of the United States Secret Service,'" Sheafe recounts. "I looked at [Secret Service Agent] Don Anderson and I said, 'We just won here. This is going to be a complete success because of Bob Dunford.' ... [Dunford] would constantly say, 'Tell me what you need and I'll help you find it.' He didn't try to dictate what was happening; he had a grasp of his role and my role, and how to complement each other."

Several participants noted that in a small city like Boston, the interdependence of law enforcement and public safety agencies in handling a large event like the DNC was an asset in building positive relationships within the security planning group. "We had to work together," Kaiser points out, "because if we didn't work well ... we wouldn't possibly have enough personnel to cover [the event]." Kaiser and Sheafe both contrasted the situation in Boston with that in New York City, where the massive police force of about 38,000—Boston's was only a little over 2,000—was virtually self-sufficient. "They can do just about anything they want with 38,000 police

officers," Kaiser says. "They don't need us." The New York police, adds Sheafe, "could basically take my steering committee and reduce it by three-fourths, because they have it all themselves. 'We don't need your hazmat [hazardous materials] stuff—we've got it. We don't need your helicopters—we've got it. We've got boats—Coast Guard, stay home.' ... They didn't need to say, 'I'd better be kind to this person because I may need something from [him].' So my mantra was that our parts are greater than their whole. They may have 40,000 officers, but what we have is each other."

Getting the Work Done. At the initial meeting of the steering committee, Sheafe told the assembled agency leaders that "I wasn't coming here with all the answers." For the most part, he let the subcommittees work independently, relying on their technical expertise and their familiarity with the city to produce viable plans for their particular area of concern. After their meetings, subcommittee co-chairs submitted "worksheets" to Sheafe, detailing "what their main issues were at the meeting, and how they felt they were resolved and [whether they] needed help from me."

Not all the subcommittees were working from an entirely blank slate. The Boston Police Department had begun formulating its own security plans back in November 2002, shortly before the city's winning bid for the convention was made public. Dunford had created a "compact team" of about five officers, who had drawn up a list of 225 tasks and established committees and subcommittees within the department to tackle them. When, months later, Sheafe set up the NSSE subcommittees, "we just transferred our ... structure over to theirs," says Dunford, "so it worked very, very smoothly."

In other cases, the subcommittees were starting from scratch. After the first meeting of the steering committee, Sheafe belatedly realized that, in Boston, Emergency Medical Services (EMS) was an independent agency and not part of the fire department, as it was in many cities. He called EMS Chief Richard Serino to invite him to join the steering committee and participate in the planning effort. In response, Serino created a 39-member subgroup of the consequence management subcommittee, including local public and private hospitals as well as government agencies, which set about drawing up plans to cover the full range of "medical and health aspects" of the security plan. "He really took a lot of ownership," Sheafe notes. "... The federal government could have carried a lot of the burden he chose to carry here locally."

Periodically, the various subcommittees made presentations before the steering committee, but these were primarily briefing sessions. The steering committee, says John Wentzell, senior vice president and general manager of the FleetCenter, was not a "critical decision-making body. ... I would say it was a validating group; it was a group that empowered their staff." The meetings of the steering committee were essentially choreographed by Sheafe to run smoothly. "I didn't want any surprises," he says. He consulted frequently with local officials, particularly Dunford, over potentially thorny matters, "because I knew that no matter what, when I sit at that table, two heads

are going to be going up and down: mine and the superintendent's." Where there were unresolved issues or differences within a subcommittee that might surface during steering committee briefings, Sheafe sought to "have a private meeting with the agencies that I thought were going to be affected," in the hopes of forestalling a larger conversation that could veer out of control. "If you've got eleven people," Sheafe notes, "and an issue is raised that affects two of them, and they're trying to have an open dialogue about it, the other people may decide to throw in their two cents just because they have an idea." So, he continues, "I kind of made the determination early on that if I've got something I think is a sticky wicket and I can get the players that are involved in a subgroup meeting and we can come to a conclusion, [then] when we come back to the [steering committee] briefing, everybody is going to agree."

This tactic extended as well to questions that Sheafe himself had about security arrangements. After observing some tabletop exercises, for example, Sheafe became "very concerned" that some Boston Fire Department officials were "very quick to want to completely evacuate the [FleetCenter]." From Sheafe's perspective, "better safe than sorry doesn't always work" where evacuation was concerned. If it proved to be a false alarm, then thousands of people would need to be screened again before being allowed back into the building; or the alarm could prove to be "a ploy to get [people] outside" and therefore vulnerable to attack. Sheafe took the matter to Fire Commissioner Paul Christian in a private meeting, where he proposed that the Secret Service should "take that responsibility for [evacuations] from off your shoulders." Initially, the fire commissioner was dubious. It was "a big issue," Christian says, "because I have statutory responsibility [for evacuation] ... and I was reluctant to give it up." At the same time, he acknowledges, some chiefs "will do maybe more than they should, to err on the side of safety" in ordering evacuations. Ultimately, he and Sheafe hammered out an agreement—in writing—which gave the Secret Service authority over evacuation decisions at the FleetCenter, but in consultation with the fire department's on-site commander. "I had no problem with it," says Christian, "after discussing it with Scott. ..."

Keeping the City Apprised. There was no official representative of the mayor's office on the steering committee, although, Sheafe says, when he talked with Dunford, in effect he was talking as well "to the police commissioner, the mayor, Julie Burns—all in one person. ... He knows the city well." Still, Sheafe kept in close touch with the host committee—and, by extension, the city—by making sure that either he or a deputy sat in on Monday morning "public agency working group" meetings that Burns organized to help manage the complex logistics of the convention.

It was in discussions with the Monday morning group and in private meetings that the most consequential security issues of the convention would be raised. While the various subcommittees were working on their plans, Sheafe, in conjunction with the venues subcommittee, was tackling the Secret Service's major direct responsibility for the DNC: the security of the FleetCenter itself. About a month after arriving in Boston, he recalls, he had met privately with

Burns, who "was concerned that the Secret Service would be making decisions that could have a negative political impact on the mayor, because he had done such hard work to get this event here [and] he didn't want to get burned as a result of that." Sheafe's response was hardly reassuring. "I said to her in a truthful manner, I'm not looking to do anything but what's right here, but I've got a public safety issue—a security issue—and a political issue, and I've got to balance the two. ... But I will be frank with you on what I'm going to decide to do, and let you know about it so you can make whatever decisions you think are appropriate."

In the months to follow, it would become clear that Burns had reason to worry. The measures Sheafe and his superiors at Secret Service headquarters were contemplating to secure the FleetCenter would affect not only the area immediately surrounding it, but potentially the entire metropolitan region, disrupting local and interstate traffic, the commutes of thousands of people, the conduct of business, and even the medical care of patients as far away as New Hampshire and Rhode Island.

Securing the FleetCenter

The Venue. A privately owned facility, the FleetCenter was home to two Boston sports teams—the Bruins and the Celtics—and host to numerous concerts and other indoor events. It was ideally located for the thousands of people who flocked to it from all parts of the city and its suburbs and even neighboring states—within walking distance of the city's downtown and easily accessible by public transit or car. But the very features that made the FleetCenter a virtue for sports fans and concert-goers made it a liability to those concerned with protecting it from harm during the convention. "From a security perspective at least," wrote one observer caustically, "the Democrats couldn't have chosen a worse site."¹³

The FleetCenter was a highly porous venue, located directly over North Station, a major public transit nexus. Everyday, roughly 24,000 commuters passed through the ground level of the facility on their way to or from the four commuter rail lines that had their terminus at North Station—the trains actually pulled in beneath the building's cantilevered overhang—where they often mingled with crowds entering the FleetCenter to attend one of its events. Another 13,200 subway commuters used the Orange and Green subway lines, which made stops one level below, in a newly renovated "superstation" scheduled to open in June 2004, a month before the DNC began. Moreover, Interstate 93, a major north-south artery, passed within 40 feet of the building's glass facade; Boston's inner harbor was visible from the FleetCenter, and Logan International Airport was a couple of miles away.¹⁴ In short, it was vulnerable to attack from any number of angles. (See Exhibit 3 for map.)

¹³ Scalet, *CSO Magazine*.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

The Threat. In the post-September 11 era, the danger of an attack on the convention was associated in most people's minds with Al Qaeda or other international terrorist organizations, but security officials believed the more likely threat would come from domestic protest groups—most notably, anarchists—whose sometimes violent tactics had disrupted the 2000 Republican and Democratic National Conventions in Philadelphia and Los Angeles. Julie Burns recalled hearing stories from the Philadelphia police of demonstrators overturning cars and setting fire to them; protesters in Los Angeles had created massive traffic jams and, according to Dunford, fired ball-bearings at police with slingshots. DNC organizers feared Boston would suffer the same fate, or worse. There was concern that protesters might “infiltrate our volunteer program,” Burns says, to gain access to the convention hall “and do something completely awful.” Law enforcement officials monitoring anarchist and other protest group websites saw signs of an intention to circumvent security measures and wreak havoc at the FleetCenter and its environs. From the evidence, says Dunford, it appeared that “we were going to get hammered.”

But while officials “felt the most probable source of a violent attack or major disruption was a domestic threat,” says the Thomas Powers, assistant special agent in charge of the Boston FBI office, “we never, ever discounted the Al Qaeda threat or any other international terrorism threat that, if they did attack, would probably be a major attack.” Such an attack could, for example, take the form of a truck loaded with explosives speeding down the highway, or a bomb planted on a commuter rail train—which was precisely what would happen in March 2004 in Madrid, shortly before elections in Spain, when a series of train bombings killed almost 200 passengers. Such incidents ratcheted up the fear that terrorists would strike at some point in the US presidential election cycle, possibly during a convention.¹⁵ “People in Boston were scared,” Sheafe maintains. “[They] were legitimately scared that something terrible was going to happen.”

Despite the FleetCenter's vulnerabilities, the Secret Service was prepared to work with what it had. Says Sheafe, “I told Rod O'Connor [CEO of the Democratic National Convention] flat out: ‘You decide what you want to do, and I'll figure out how to make it safe. I'm not going to dictate to you what you can and can't do. I'll build you a utopia, and you can do whatever you want inside it.’” For the city, however, Sheafe's message was tougher. “The [analogy] I use,” he explains, “[is] somebody rang the doorbell at the doctor's office and said, ‘Look, I feel awful. Can you make me better?’ We said, ‘Sure, ... but it's going to take some lifestyle changes to get you better.’”

The Solution. As the agency charged with protecting the president and other high officials, the Secret Service had developed and refined an effective technique for ensuring the safety of its charges. The job of the Secret Service, Sheafe says, “is not to do bodyguarding. Physical protection is going to fail.” Secret Service agents, he points out, did not brandish guns or “put our hands on

¹⁵ In early July 2004, just a few weeks before the DNC began, DHS Secretary Tom Ridge issued a warning that Al Qaeda terrorists were “moving forward” with plans to launch an attack on the US sometime during the election. [Charlie Savage, “Al Qaeda planning attack, Ridge says,” *The Boston Globe*, July 9, 2004, p. A1.]

people, because if it has gotten to that point, we've already lost." Instead, the agency relied on "advance work"—or, as Sheafe puts it, "environmental manipulation"—to protect the dignitaries under its care. So, for example, when President Bush threw out the first ball at a game at Yankee Stadium one month after the September 11 terrorist attacks, Sheafe notes, "you [couldn't] see a Secret Service agent anywhere. How is that? You manipulate your environment. You take the stadium and you empty it. You search the entire thing. Then you screen everybody coming in to bring it to the same level as you would if they were walking into the White House." Admittedly, this was a "very expensive ... and time-consuming" approach, but it had a long history of success. It was this approach that the Secret Service brought to its security planning for the DNC, where it would propose to do, in Sheafe's words, "a tremendous amount of environmental manipulation."

As Sheafe recalls, he had been in Boston only "about a week and a half, and [already] knew how I wanted it to look"—that is, how he wanted to go about making the FleetCenter secure. Essentially, it would mean employing the Secret Service's practice of isolating a site, searching it thoroughly, and then allowing only those who had been screened to pass through. It also meant ensuring that the now-secured venue would remain uncontaminated by anyone or anything that was not authorized to come in it, or even near it. In turn, this would mean keeping subway and rail commuters from mingling with conventioners, and keeping vehicles from passing close enough to do damage to the facility.

The Station. Some of the precautions the Secret Service would require had been anticipated. During the DNC bidding process, says Michael Mulhern, who was then general manager of the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (MBTA),¹⁶ "it was clearly understood that we would be adjusting the stopping locations and the lengths of some of our [commuter rail] trains so we could ... stay out from underneath the cantilevered overhang." The MBTA planned to have Orange and Green Line passengers disembark at stops before North Station, a difference of just a few blocks, so that the subway trains could pass beneath the FleetCenter without stopping. In addition, it would build a temporary platform about 100 feet away from the facility where commuter trains could stop and let passengers on and off; instead of entering the FleetCenter, passengers would be directed to the side streets east or west of the building and out on to Causeway Street, the thoroughfare that separated the FleetCenter and North Station from a commercial and business area known as the Bullfinch Triangle.¹⁷

But it soon became apparent that there were problems with this latter scenario. The Secret Service wanted its secure perimeter—what was later called the "hard zone"—to include the streets bordering the FleetCenter. This area would be under the tightest control. "We sweep the entire

¹⁶ Mulhern stepped down as MBTA general manager for a private sector job in May 2005.

¹⁷ The precise boundaries of the Bullfinch Triangle varied in some accounts. Roughly speaking, it was the area bordered by Causeway Street to the north, Merrimac Street to the west, North Washington Street to the east, and Haymarket Square to the south. The upper right side of the triangle, bordered by Canal Street on the west, was largely a construction site that would be used as a staging area for delegates' buses.

area—the Secret Service, [the Boston police], bomb-sniffing dogs—the whole thing,” Dunford explains. “We [sweep] the building, then out into the streets, sweep the entire streets, move everyone that is in there. ... And then we seal it. Once we seal it, the only way we could maintain security is that everyone who comes there goes through a magnetometer as an authorized person.” After all this painstaking effort, it would not be acceptable, says Sheafe, to have hordes of commuters walking “right into my venue, right into my secure area.” The best solution, from a security perspective, would be to close North Station to commuter rail altogether.

Not surprisingly, Mulhern strongly resisted the idea. “He was determined,” Sheafe says, “to keep the train station open” for commuters. Mulhern, adds Dunford, “fought us tooth and nail.” But the MBTA general manager was not the only one with reservations about closing North Station. Governor Mitt Romney, a conservative Republican who took office in January 2003, was opposed to the idea, according to Mulhern “The governor,” Mulhern recalls, “was pushing back, saying not to close it ... because we can’t be inconveniencing all those [commuters] coming from the north just because the Democrats want to have a party.” Romney was himself familiar with the workings of an NSSE from his experience running the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City. He had welcomed the DNC to Boston, but made it clear that he frowned on spending state taxpayer dollars on political events; and some in his administration thought, as Mulhern puts it, that “the MBTA went too far in our commitments” to the convention.¹⁸

Mulhern describes himself as an enthusiastic supporter of the city’s bid for the DNC, pledging services that he estimated would cost the MBTA about \$1.5 to \$2 million—a figure that would eventually more than double. “I have a pretty good relationship with the mayor,” he says, “and I believed in everything the mayor was trying to do. And quite frankly, I looked at [the DNC] as not only a big advertisement for the city of Boston, but a big advertisement for our transit system. I always felt [there] was going to be a huge return on our investment.” Now, however, Mulhern found himself being “second-guessed left and right,” as he puts it, as it became clear that security requirements would drive up the cost to the transit authority. “I did not want to send the wrong signal to the mayor, in terms of wavering on our commitments,” Mulhern explains, “but yet I tried to walk a very fine line with the [Romney] administration to get to where they needed to be in terms of what their public position was. And it got a little dicey there for awhile.”

The controversy over the closure of North Station came to a head in early 2004, at a meeting in Mayor Menino’s office that included Mulhern, Dunford, and Julie Burns. Dunford—who was Sheafe’s strongest ally in the issue¹⁹—“was saying, ‘You’ve got to do it [i.e., close the station],’” Mulhern recalls. “... I was very concerned. ... I said, ‘I need to be convinced.’ ... And the mayor said, ‘Listen, until we decide [what to do], I don’t want to hear any more arguing, any more

¹⁸ The MBTA was an independent authority, but the secretary of transportation, a gubernatorial appointee, chaired its board.

¹⁹ In fact, says Sheafe, Dunford had written a memo “suggesting what needed to be done [to secure the site] very early on, even before I showed up. You don’t have to be a Secret Service agent to figure out a secure site.”

sparring.” At that point, the parties agreed to try to hammer out a solution that would be satisfactory on all sides. It would be a challenging task: as word got out that the Secret Service was contemplating closing down the Orange Line platform at North Station—the possibility of a complete closure had not yet surfaced publicly—*The Boston Globe* weighed in on the debate. The Secret Service, it wrote in an August 23, 2003 editorial, “ought to remember that the FleetCenter is a desirable site for a convention precisely because of its location at a transit nexus. Security should enhance the safety of delegates and others without walling off the convention from its lively host city.” For those who were concerned about walling off the convention from the city, however, there was worse news to come.

The Interstate. Interstate 93, one of the busiest roads in Massachusetts, ran down from Vermont, through New Hampshire, and through the heart of Boston on its way to connecting with I-95, the major north-south highway along the eastern seaboard. It was heavily used by commuters from north and south of Boston, and was a major truck route for the region. On an average weekday, an estimated 200,000 vehicles traveled the road.²⁰ As part of the massive road and tunnel project known as the Big Dig, the elevated stretches of I-93 running through the city were slated to be dismantled, and the tunnels that would replace them were scheduled to open in December 2003. It was the southbound lanes of I-93 that would pass within forty feet of the glass façade of the FleetCenter—much too close for the Secret Service’s comfort. “Security specialists,” *The Boston Globe* reported, “recommend a 150-foot buffer zone between the building being protected and the first point where an explosives-laden vehicle can have access.” Even the northbound lanes, the paper pointed out, fell within the 150-foot radius.²¹

Sheafe had been eyeing the highway since he first arrived in Boston. “I’m looking at this, and I’m saying to myself, okay, I need offset. I need reasonable distance to secure [the FleetCenter].” At his request, the technical security division of the Secret Service sent experts to do “blast surveys” of the area; the Secret Service also hired an outside contractor to do “independent research” on the site’s vulnerability to explosives. In addition, he asked three assistant directors from headquarters to tour the site with him about six months before the start of the convention in July. Ultimately, he explains, the senior agency officials would “be making the final decisions” on any roadway or transit station closures, and making the case for closures to city and state political leaders. Their visit to the area “provided me the ability to foreshadow for them some issues that were going to come [up] later. We weren’t going to cry wolf about road closures and train closures before it was necessary. But it was easier for me to explain to them, look, we [may] need to meet with the governor, [after] they’ve seen it ... and have some knowledge of the obstacles we’re up against.”

²⁰ Scalet, *CSO Magazine*.

²¹ Rick Klein and Anthony Flint, “Security for DNC to snarl X-way,” *The Boston Globe*, October 30, 2003, p. B1.

The findings of the blast surveys confirmed Sheafe's initial assessment: the FleetCenter could not be safeguarded from a vehicle packed with explosives traveling through the tunnel. "If you just use a regular sedan," Dunford notes, "you're probably talking 120-125 feet standoff distance that you need. ... You start getting into a truck or an 18-wheeler, you need thousands of feet standoff distance." That someone might try to detonate a car or truck bomb from I-93 during the convention did not seem a remote possibility to those in charge of security for the convention. "The issue for the Secret Service," Sheafe explains, "is that you can't tell me that this [i.e., the FleetCenter] isn't a target. I cannot be convinced that this [wouldn't be] a target 24 hours a day for the four days [of the DNC]."

Under the circumstances, the ideal solution, to the Secret Service at least, was clear: "to do this right," Sheafe says, "that road should be closed ... for four straight days, period. End of discussion. Close it, never open it, and don't let any cars on it." But, as Sheafe was aware, the ideal solution did not take into account the high price it would extract from the city and its environs.

The Cost of Closure. The impact of closing any portion of I-93 would be hard to overestimate. For commuters from the north in particular, who already faced disruptions if North Station—the terminus for commuter rail lines serving the northern suburbs—were to close as well, the shut-down of I-93 would likely mean long back-ups on alternative roads into the city. Truckers serving the region would face similar traffic jams and delays. Businesses might be harmed if goods were not delivered in a timely fashion or if workers found it difficult to get to their jobs or if customers stayed home rather than face congested highways and streets. Even medical care could be compromised: I-93 was the main route from north and south for patients as far away as New Hampshire and Rhode Island seeking care at one of Boston's major teaching hospitals—most notably, Massachusetts General Hospital, which was nearest the FleetCenter. In short, closing I-93 would be, says Colonel Thomas Robbins, superintendent of the Massachusetts State Police, "a traffic nightmare."

There were other costs as well. Shutting down I-93 would make enormous logistical demands on the state police, who would be responsible for managing any kind of highway closure. Even estimating the effect of closing a major artery was difficult. "The state police had an incredibly big challenge in trying to model it," Burns notes. "There was no data that they could use to say what would happen to traffic if the highway was closed for four days, because it had never happened."

Moreover, the manpower needed to divert traffic from the closed highway would severely tax the state police force of 2,300 officers. As it was, police forces throughout the state would be stretched thin by convention-related duties. There "weren't enough bodies to go around to secure all the events," says Burns, both on-site and off. The Boston police were planning to borrow heavily from other forces—the state police, the Suffolk County Sheriff's Office, the state Department of Corrections, the Boston Municipal Police, and the Massachusetts National Guard,

as well as police from neighboring cities and towns. "We used everybody in the department," says Dunford, "and everybody we could get our hands on."²² The state police would already have responsibility for law enforcement in one of eight security zones in the city created by the Boston Police Department for the duration of the convention, as well as their usual policing duties for the rest of the state; how they would find the officers to manage traffic on I-93 was an open question.

Creating Options. Sometime in the fall of 2003, Sheafe began discussions with both the Boston police and the state police, in part to share his concerns about the highway and in part to get "fully educated on what the road meant to the region." In these sessions, as he remembers it, he would say, "Gentlemen, let me tell you what my burden is. I think my burden is full closure, 24 hours a day for the four days of the convention." And they'd say, 'Whew, that's pretty significant. ... To be honest, that's going to be crippling.' ... And they'd educate me on how 24 hours a day for four days is a problem, and I'd take that information back to [Secret Service headquarters in] Washington." These talks led to a kind of shuttle diplomacy for Sheafe, in which various scenarios for dealing with I-93 would be considered by both sides in the discussion. "We would talk issues and game it out, and then [I] would fly out to Washington, DC and brief the assistant director," Sheafe says; the assistant director also traveled to Boston to meet with the state police superintendent. Ultimately, four options for I-93 emerged, ranging from complete closure to closure only on certain days or for certain hours.

Discussions of the pros and cons of these scenarios were still underway when the Boston Police Department circulated a document outlining the four options during an October 2003 meeting of Burns' Monday morning group, where, according to Sheafe, they created quite a stir. For some of those present, this was the first time they were learning that a complete shutdown of I-93 was one of the options under consideration. The revelation elicited some strongly negative reactions. Sheafe recalls one official from the state highway department whose "basic assertion to us was that it's impossible to do that; it cannot happen. ... There were people who said this will absolutely cripple the city of Boston. The financial repercussions will be so obscene and damaging that there will be no recovery from it."²³

Burns, too, recalls the consternation among Monday morning group members when they saw the options. "Our response was," she says, "'Absolutely not. You're not closing I-93.'" For the city, the ramifications of closing the road were politically awkward as well as logistically staggering. It meant, Burns explains, "the city going to the state and saying, 'Okay, we bid for this;

²² To pay for the skyrocketing costs of security for the Democratic and Republican conventions, most of it for overtime pay for law enforcement and emergency response personnel, the cities of Boston and New York together sought additional funds from Washington. In late 2003, Congress appropriated \$25 million for each city for security-related expenses. Later, in June 2004, the mayors of both cities would ask for, and get, an additional \$25 million in federal funds.

²³ News that the Secret Service was considering a shutdown of I-93 quickly made its way into the *Globe*, though not the front page; the October 30 article did, however, strike an ominous note in its headline: "Security for DNC to snarl X-way."

it's our event and it's your road and, oh, by the way, you have to close it." While the Secret Service could frame the road closing "in terms of law enforcement, myself and the host committee and ... the politicians had to talk about it in much more political terms—what are you doing to businesses, what are you doing to commuters, what are you doing to residents? Can people even function around the FleetCenter?"

The state's response to the option of closing I-93 was equally emphatic. Col. Robbins of the state police recalls meetings in which "the state police and all the other state entities and local entities were saying to the Secret Service, 'You cannot close down 93; you just can't do it. I don't know what you're thinking.'" For the state, the shutdown of the highway imposed two kinds of burdens—on the state police and on the economy. Foremost, according to Robert Haas, undersecretary of public safety in the Romney administration, was the ripple effect it would have on the struggling regional economy. While Governor Romney readily acknowledged that "it's fine to host an event like this," Haas says, he questioned whether "we can afford to shut down our largest city for a week, and what kind of economic impact [it was] going to have, not just for the city, but for the entire region, because you have commerce that's passing through all the time." Burns also recalls a meeting with some members of the governor's cabinet in which there were "diatribes about if we close the highway, the entire region is going to shut down, and [people were asking] is there any other way to do this?"

In the mayor's office, the same question was being asked as well. When he first learned, in the fall of 2003, that closure of I-93 was being contemplated, Mayor Menino recalls, he thought the idea was "very extreme"—although, he acknowledges, the Secret Service had to "protect their own interests also. ... They were the lead agency. If something happened, they'd get their heads kicked in." But whatever his personal opinion in the matter, Menino did not want to pick a public fight with the Secret Service—or any law enforcement agency. Instead, he says, he told Burns and David Passafaro, president of the host committee, "that we'd better negotiate this thing. ... It can't be in cement. Let's figure this out, how we [can] work it out."

This approach suited Sheafe, at least for the time being. "I think everyone wanted to give the issue the proper amount of time before the final decision was made." He continued to explore the four scenarios in meetings with city and state police, and to consult with Secret Service headquarters in Washington. "What I was trying to do," he explains, "was shine the light on [the] issue without forcing it down [anyone's] throat, and without giving the impression that I'm going to take sole ownership of the decision." Periodically, he would get together with Menino and other city officials to go over a variety of security issues, including I-93. The mayor, Sheafe recalls, was supportive of the work Dunford and others were doing to ensure the public safety during the convention, but "he's not going to address an issue before it specifically needs to be addressed. ... So we let some issues slide down the line to be addressed at the proper time. ... [But] the mayor knows it's coming."

