UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Aviation and Airport Holiday Travel Preparations
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Good morning Chairman Costello, Ranking Member Petri, and Members of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Aviation.

I am very pleased to be here today to talk about issues that are critical to the nation's air carriers and to the traveling public. My name is Ed Faberman and I am Executive Director of the Air Carrier Association of America. The ACAA and its low-fare members are dedicated to bringing affordable airfares to all American travelers who reap significant benefits when low-fare options are available in their communities.

We thank this Committee for holding this hearing and for your dedication to enhancing the nation's ATC system and for supporting the growth of air commerce and airline competition.

We are working very closely with Secretary Peters and Acting Administrator Sturgell to address delay and congestion issues that are once again plaguing the industry and disrupting the travel plans of travelers. Unfortunately, these are not new issues.[1] No matter what plans are made to improve operations, steps must also be taken to promote competition and not further limit it.

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[1] FAA has on multiple occasions in the past addressed growing congestion problems. Unfortunately, the fixes developed have closed markets and limited competition. In 1968, the Acting Administrator of the FAA (Notice of Proposed Rule Making and Notice of Public Hearing; 33 FR 12580, September 5, 1968) stated:

> Delays of varying magnitude are encountered at many terminal areas... Congestion at these terminals frequently requires the imposition of traffic flow restrictions creating backup delays throughout the air transportation system.
> A reduction in air traffic delays can be accomplished only by increasing the capacity of the system or decreasing the demands placed upon it. Certain changes in air traffic and airport procedures and practices are already planned by the FAA to increase aircraft handling capacity.

Holiday travel figures are expected to be at an all-time high this season. One reason so many individuals are traveling over the holidays is because of the growth of low-fare carriers. These carriers bring additional travel options for families, business travelers, and vacationers. They have improved competition and brought a high level of service and amenities to Americans who historically could not afford it.

The airline members of the ACAA are preparing for the holiday season by taking steps to make the travel experience more pleasant for passengers. Carriers are increasing their communications with airports to maintain the back-and-forth dialogue that has helped both parties work through other busy travel periods. They are also providing frequent updates and support to the Transportation Safety Administration ("TSA") officials at the airports they serve, in order to keep those channels of communication open and help improve airport screening. We are also talking to TSA about the importance of fully staffing checkpoints in order to accommodate the record numbers of passengers. In some scenarios, carriers have funded additional security equipment and supplemented the staffing needs.

Steps Taken By Carriers to Prepare Passengers for Holiday Travel

Carriers are reaching out to passengers through websites, emails, and at check-in to provide updated information. One of the difficulties of the holiday period is that a large percentage of passengers are not regular travelers and are thus not accustomed to the security precautions. Preparing passengers before the holiday season helps to eliminate some of those issues. Other steps carriers are taking include:

- **Publicizing TSA security information and other helpful travel hints on websites and through emails.** These electronic communications are an effective method of reminding passengers how they can help shorten wait times.
- **Reminding passengers about liquid restrictions, carry-on bag limitations, and the importance of not wrapping presents before traveling.** These reminders help passengers take proactive steps to speed up the time it takes to

pass through security checkpoints and avoid situations such as having to throw away restricted carry-on items, which sometimes causes unnecessary frustration.

- **Encouraging passengers to arrive at the airport earlier than usual and to expect larger crowds and longer waits.** These warnings help improve passenger patience, as they can then be prepared for the minor inconveniences that the holiday season travel brings.
- **Instituting early notification systems to notify passengers of delays by email, website, or cell phone message.** This gives passengers as early a warning as possible so the delay's impact on the traveler is minimized. By making these efforts, carriers show that they value the passengers' time and are making a concerted effort to keep passengers informed and up-to-date.
- **Reminding customers about online check-in options and the use of automated check-in stations at the airport.** This allows passengers to complete several of the check-in steps before they leave home and allows those without checked luggage to head directly to the security checkpoint. It also frees up reservation agents so that they can spend time assisting passengers with less routine issues.
- **Increasing staffing of pilots, flight attendants, and reservation agents.** This helps move more passengers more quickly and without unnecessary delays that might result from illness or absences.
- **Putting into place automated flight rebooking.** This procedure helps expedite rebooking by automatically switching passenger to a new flight, should this become necessary due to a cancellation.

Specific Carriers

In addition to enhanced staffing and improved communication with passengers, some carriers have gone even further and taken additional steps to ease holiday travel difficulties. Examples of some of those extra steps include the following:

- **AirTran Airways**
  - AirTran implemented NetTracer, the most powerful baggage system in the industry today, which provides a best-of-class search engine to improve baggage tracing and claims processing for both passengers and airline employees.
  - AirTran has also increased communications with travelers through press releases and helpful emails to improve the flow of information to passengers.
- **Frontier Airlines**
  - As a result of the impacts of last year's massive snow storm, Frontier has taken significant steps to avoid a reoccurrence of those problems. The improvements at Denver International Airport (DIA) include:
    - Nearly double the number of ticket counter positions,
    - 49 additional self-service kiosks at counters,
    - 14 additional self-service kiosks in the lobby,
    - a 16.5% increase in Customer Service staff,
    - a 30% increase in outbound luggage capacity, and
    - approximately $150,000 in new snow removal equipment for aircraft parking areas and gates at DIA.
- **Spirit Airlines**
  - Spirit has worked with Fort Lauderdale Hollywood International Airport (FLL) authorities to implement the following improvements:
    - A five fold increase in queue capacity,
    - a 60% increase in counter availability to process passengers more quickly, and
    - new CTX machines with a 40% better throughput capability than the old machines.

All of the practices mentioned above will address holiday travel problems. However, these steps involve significant effort and resources and are being implemented

at a time when other costs are also rising. We are not operating in an environment where costs are stable – rather, costs including fuel, security and facility expenses continue to increase. Smaller carriers are not in a position to take extra steps at all airports because they may have limited facilities at those airports and depend on other carriers who control facilities for help. Therefore the costs for smaller carriers are higher at many airports. As a result, it is essential that government agencies be able to fully fund their responsibilities. This has been an issue with Customs and Border Protection. Because of funding issues, they have reduced staffing at several airports. This could have a major impact during the holiday season. We share the concerns expressed by Airports Council International (ACI) about the impacts of this.

As we enter the holiday season and the inevitable delays that accompany it, steps must be taken to lessen the overwhelming impact that delays have on smaller carriers. We have asked FAA to implement delay-free operations at congested airports, which would allow smaller carriers some ability to operate on a timely basis. Every carrier would be allotted the same number of these delay-free arrivals, which the carriers would then assign to specific flights. Those flights would then operate on-time and without delays, even if other flights at the airport are delayed (except in the event of severe weather conditions or other unusual system delays). Delay-free arrivals benefit carriers by granting them the security that specified flights (likely to hubs) will always operate on time. Delay-free arrivals will provide significant advantages to small carriers, as these carriers cannot address delays in the same ways that large carriers can. Small carriers do not have the flexibility to move flights and aircraft to minimize the impact of delays or large enough flight schedules to efficiently re-route passengers during periods of delays and congestion. All carriers will derive benefits from these flights because they can designate delay-free flights to their hub or for unique other flights where on-time departures are particularly important.

Conclusion

This Committee has played an active role in improving the nation's aviation system and in opening doors to competition and travel options for consumers. The ACAA applauds those efforts and thanks the Committee for holding these hearings. We are anxious to work with the Committee and the Administration to address issues that significantly impact carriers, passenger and commuters.

It is essential that we create a first rate system that makes flying easier and safer. At the same time we must continue the dream of deregulation. All action taken must ensure that competition is not blocked. Some of the proposals to address delays and congestion that are currently being discussed could close the door on competition and growth of small carriers at major airports. Special care must be taken to ensure that this does not happen. Our dream is to create a high tech, safe, "delay free" and secure system that maximizes consumer choices and ensures that low fares are available to all.

We look forward to working with you on this and all matters. Thank you.