

STATEMENT OF LYNNE OSMUS, ACTING ADMINISTRATOR, FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION, ON THE FAA REAUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2009, BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE, SUBCOMMITTEE ON AVIATION, FEBRUARY 11, 2009.

Chairman Costello, Congressman Petri, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for inviting me here today to be a part of your discussion about the reauthorization of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). We at the FAA, and the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) as a whole, look forward to working with this Committee and the new Congress on achieving a robust, multiyear bill that will help ensure the safety of the flying public and efficiency of the National Airspace System (NAS). This is an exciting time in our Nation's history, as a new Administration takes the reins and establishes its policies. With new Members in Congress as well, fresh ideas and innovative approaches to challenging problems are sure to come. As Acting Administrator, I look forward to facilitating that as much as possible.

FAA reauthorization is a priority for the Department. As the new Administration settles in and continues to get its policy team in place, we will have the opportunity to analyze the Committee's proposal and develop an Administration position on FAA reauthorization. There is a challenging legislative agenda this session and circumstances have dictated that during this first month of the Administration, the legislative focus be on the economic stimulus package. I can assure you, though, that the Secretary views the aviation reauthorization as one of his top legislative priorities. In the meantime, please accept my gratitude on behalf of the Administration for your efforts in moving the FAA's reauthorization forward. There is a consensus in the aviation community, and certainly in the FAA, that multiple, short-term extensions as we have had in the last 18 months are burdensome and disruptive, and do not permit the careful planning and efficient execution that is necessary for successful infrastructure and technology programs.

Secretary LaHood has demonstrated that the FAA is at the top of his list of priorities. He visited FAA headquarters twice in his first week as Secretary, meeting first with the

executive management team, and then holding a town hall meeting where all employees were invited to attend. In addition to the overflow crowd in the FAA auditorium, the town hall was shown via video broadcast to other FAA offices.

The Secretary has indicated several times in his confirmation hearing and to FAA employees that one of his immediate goals is to fill the position of FAA Administrator, in order to move forward as quickly and seamlessly as possible. He has expressed that the new Administrator will be one who can advance the Next Generation Air Transportation System (NextGen) and refine benchmarks for the program for the next five to eight years. The Secretary has also noted that one criterion for a successful FAA Administrator is someone with the people skills to resolve outstanding labor issues, something to which many Members of this Committee are also committed. I am also confident that any new Administrator will work closely with the Committee to ensure these goals are part of any future aviation legislation.

Secretary LaHood has also established four primary areas of focus for the DOT and FAA: safety, economy, sustainability, and livability. At the FAA, our highest priority is always safety. It is our mandate and it is our passion. We are currently in the safest period in commercial aviation history, and every day, every hour, we are doing everything we can to make sure that continues. Secretary LaHood intends to continue that legacy.

Even with the strong safety record aviation is currently enjoying, we are continuing our efforts to make the system even safer. For example, the FAA is making it a priority to reduce the number of runway incursions—and we are seeing strong results. There were no serious runway incursions in the first quarter of fiscal year 2009 — not a single Category A or B event during 12.8 million aircraft operations. Category A and B runway incursions are the most serious, in which a collision was narrowly avoided or where there is a significant potential for a collision. Category C and D incidents present no immediate safety consequences to the public.

This phenomenal achievement is the direct result of a focused commitment at all levels of the aviation industry – from management at airports, airlines, and the FAA to pilots,

mechanics, vehicle operators, and air traffic controllers. Between fiscal year 2000 and the close of fiscal year 2008 on Sept. 30, 2008, serious runway incursions have decreased by 63 percent. All categories of runway incursions were down slightly for the first quarter of fiscal 2009 versus the same period a year earlier – 224 in 2009 compared to 226 in 2008.

Runway safety initiatives include enhancements to airport markings, signage and lighting; implementation of new technology such as runway status lights and cockpit moving map displays; and increased runway safety training and awareness among pilots, air traffic controllers and airport vehicle drivers. We have accelerated our runway status lights program, and the systems are scheduled to be installed at 22 of the nation's busiest airports by FY 2011.

In these challenging economic times, we must also consider our aviation infrastructure. As the Secretary has noted, transportation infrastructure is a substantial part of the Administration's economic recovery plan, and he is making the successful implementation of that initiative one of his top priorities. New infrastructure investment pays enormous short- and long-term dividends, creating economic and social benefits for generations. The Secretary has also committed to supporting investments that will help bring the country's transportation assets up to a state of good repair.

We have only to look as far back as last November for a prime example. That was when we commissioned three new runways in a single day – at Washington Dulles, Chicago O'Hare, and Seattle-Tacoma (Sea-Tac) International Airports. Spanning a total of more than 25,000 feet, these three runways are expected to increase capacity at these major airports, as well as significantly reduce delays. The new runways at Dulles and O'Hare have the potential to accommodate more than 150,000 additional annual operations in the NAS (100,000 at Dulles and 52,000 at O'Hare), while we expect delays to decrease at both airports.

The Sea-Tac runway is expected to significantly reduce weather-related delays that have plagued the airport. Because of low clouds — which occur about 44 percent of the time

— the airport is often confined to using one arrival stream instead of two. The introduction of a third runway will allow Sea-Tac to handle two simultaneous staggered arrival streams in poor weather. This translates into as many as eight additional on-time arrivals per hour.

While we are looking to improve economic development, we must also give priority attention to environmental stewardship – the Secretary’s sustainability priority. Increases in air transportation demand will place significant environmental pressures on the national airspace system. Environmental protection that allows sustainable aviation growth is a key goal, and we have placed addressing environmental issues at the heart of NextGen. We have a plan that offers a systematic approach that builds on better science and improved decision support tools, advanced air traffic procedures, enhanced aircraft technology, sustainable alternative fuels, and policies to address environmental challenges. Advances in aircraft technology and renewable fuels are essential if we are to provide solutions for the energy and climate challenges for the U.S. aviation system. The close partner to this sustainable development is livability, the fourth area of this Administration’s priorities. In aviation, this entails a commitment to the flying public to continue to focus on the safety, convenience, and confidence of the traveling public, with minimal environmental impacts on our communities.

With these priorities on the table, the DOT and FAA are poised to move forward. But while we have new leadership still to come, we are not content simply to sit back.

Just two weeks ago, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) removed the FAA's air traffic control modernization program from its High Risk List (HRL) for the first time in 14 years. The HRL identifies Federal programs and operations that the GAO deems as high risk due to their greater vulnerabilities to fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement. The FAA was initially placed on the HRL in 1995 due to our poor track record of program deployment and cost over-runs. The GAO noted that management focus and willingness to attack and rectify our shortcomings were the reasons that it felt comfortable removing FAA modernization from the High Risk List. The GAO also noted our plan to continue improvements into 2009.

Also this January, testing for NextGen is accelerating with an agreement to equip US Airways aircraft with GPS-based Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast. The FAA partnership with US Airways and Aviation Communication and Surveillance Systems will equip 20 US Airways Airbus A330s with ADS-B avionics for tests at Philadelphia International Airport. ADS-B allows aircraft to be tracked by satellite rather than radar, allowing more precise information to boost safety and ease congestion. ADS-B uses GPS to broadcast the position and intent of an aircraft to air traffic controllers and other pilots.

Under the agreement, the A330s will use both ADS-B “In” and ADS-B “Out” signals. ADS-B “In” is information sent into the cockpit, and will be used to evaluate potential safety improvements on the airport surface; ADS-B “Out” involves an aircraft broadcasting information, such as its location, out to ground stations and other aircraft, allowing controllers to separate traffic. In 2007, FAA issued a proposed regulation that, if finalized, would require ADS-B “Out” equipment on all aircraft operating in certain classes of airspace within the NAS by 2020. FAA has yet not issued a regulation proposing a timeframe for the adoption of ADS-B “In”.

On January 30, we published an updated NextGen Implementation Plan that details our strategies for accelerating NextGen operational capabilities in the 2012-2018 mid-term timeframe. Implementing NextGen over the next 10 years will enable significant safety, environmental, and operational improvements. This is clearly seen through our initial NextGen demonstrations, operational trials and deployments. This early work has also provided invaluable data and insights to allow FAA to use the power of modeling and simulation to assess the integrated NextGen benefits across a range of future scenarios.

Our preliminary modeling of a series of NextGen capabilities shows that by 2018 total flight delays may be reduced by 35-40 percent, saving almost a billion gallons of fuel. This is compared to the “do nothing” case, which shows what would happen if we operate in 2018 the same way as today. The current model includes one-third of the NextGen changes. It is important to note that our modeling and simulation results are

preliminary, and as the model matures the FAA expects these benefits values will increase.

As NextGen planning evolves, we may reduce uncertainty in our assumptions and we may develop and validate additional modeling capability for currently un-modeled NextGen capabilities, such as improved traffic flow around adverse weather. Because NextGen benefits are integrally linked to equipage rates, it is imperative that the FAA works closely with all aspects of the aviation community on NextGen deployment.

Finally, no organization is successful without its most valuable asset – its workforce. Controller hiring is up and we have a record number of applicants. While our historical hiring goal was a “one-for-one” model (one new hire for every one retirement), beginning in 2004, we increased our hiring targets to prepare for the anticipated retirements in the next decade. We've hired 5000 new controllers over the past three years. We exceeded our hiring goals for FY 2008, and we are on track to meet our end of year hiring goal in FY 2009. New controllers are completing their training faster – in fact, we anticipate that 1000 new hires will complete training to reach full certification this year, compared to 762 last year. Controller retirements have also leveled out and are trending below what we had projected for this year.

For the past several years we have also enjoyed increased hiring in the Aviation Safety organization. Through those hires, we have been able to support certification of new products and new operators – while assuring the continued operational safety of all those who hold FAA certificates. But we will never have enough people to be present at the operation of every aircraft or the turning of every wrench. That’s why we need to rely on voluntary reporting systems – where pilots, mechanics, flight attendants and operators can tell us what they’re seeing in the system that may introduce risk. I know this Committee identified some concerns over our management of voluntary reporting systems. We have improved those processes and will continue to do so. You have our commitment that they will be used to enhance safety – and not abused by anyone in the system.

As you can see, we are still actively moving forward on all key areas. The FAA is a growing, learning organization, dedicated to the safety of the traveling public and the efficient operation of the NAS. We look forward to supporting the new President's agenda for aviation, a new FAA Administrator, and to working with this Committee and the rest of the Congress on FAA reauthorization legislation. In the meantime, we remain focused on our duties to ensure aviation safety and efficiency.

Mr. Chairman, Congressman Petri, Members of the Subcommittee, this concludes my prepared remarks. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.