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Hearing on the Aviation Delay Prevention Act
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Chairwoman Hutchison, Senator Rockefeller and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the invitation to testify before you today on the very serious issues of airport capacity and airline delays. We support passage of the Aviation Delay Prevention Act, especially those provisions that would expedite the environmental review process that is frustrating our efforts to add capacity at DFW and other of the Nation's key hub airports. As you know full well, Senator Hutchison, even in Texas, where we are blessed with Nature's bounty, airport expansion has become an extremely lengthy and contentious process. Your bill will certainly help to change that!

As seasoned travelers, all of you have surely experienced the anxiety and frustration associated with the ever-increasing flight delays and cancellations that have plagued—and that continue to plague—the United States' aviation system. Unfortunately, the situation is only expected to get worse. In fact, air travel in the United States alone is expected to grow from its current level of 650 million enplaned passengers to almost *one billion* enplaned passengers by the year 2009, only eight short years away. That growth is equal—literally—to the traffic handled by 10 NEW DFW International Airports. That's truly phenomenal growth. In addition, international travel is also expected to increase—in fact almost double—over the next 10 years to nearly 250 million enplanements by the year 2011.

In an effort to accommodate this expected explosion in air travel over the next decade, airports across the country have begun the laborious—not to mention very expensive—process of developing the infrastructure and adding the capacity necessary to safely and efficiently transport passengers through our Nation's airports.

DFW Airport's Capital Development Program: Adding Capacity

Blessed with 18,000 acres, DFW certainly has room to add the necessary capacity. As many of you already know, DFW Airport has been operational for almost 27 years and has grown to become the third busiest airport in the world in terms of operations. As air traffic at DFW Airport and across the Nation becomes increasingly congested, however, there is little that we, as airport operators, can do to help alleviate the impending gridlock *without the proper infrastructure in place to accommodate the demand*.

Like many other major airports across the country, DFW recently embarked upon its latest Capital Development Program, which will see DFW Airport invest $2.5 billion for a variety of capacity-enhancing projects designed to alleviate delays in our terminals and on our runways. Specifically, DFW Airport is in acute need of additional gate space to accommodate the increase in international and domestic flights and new air carriers**,** including the influx of low-fare carriers that want to serve or expand service at the Airport.

To accommodate this increase, we have recently broken ground on a new, $1 billion international terminal—"Terminal D"—that will provide DFW Airport's international passengers, our fastest-growing passenger segment**,** with a single, consolidated, world-class travel facility. Most importantly, this new terminal will provide DFW Airport with 23 additional and much-needed gates to add to our existing 132 gates.

Also to enhance capacity, DFW Airport is building a new People Mover System, which will provide Airport passengers with a high-speed, state-of-the-art system of trains that will enable passengers to travel between connecting gates within the Airport's main terminal area in record time. With trains scheduled to arrive from each direction every two minutes, this new system will provide all passengers—especially passengers who must rush to make connections between and among our soon-to-be five terminals—with a very high level of service.

In addition to the new terminal and the new People Mover System, DFW Airport is also undertaking several airfield enhancement projects, including three runway extensions, aircraft holding aprons and taxiways, in order to continue to improve aircraft movement, reduce taxiway congestion and increase volume. These projects will enhance air traffic controllers' efficiency, help accommodate the increased passenger flow and reduce delays at DFW Airport and across the Nation.

The Environmental Review Process

While it's true that the projects I have just described will go a long way toward reducing delays, probably the single most crucial element to increasing capacity is *adding runways*.

According to the Department of Transportation's Office of Inspector General (OIG), between 1991 and 2000, *only six new runways were added* at the Nation's largest airports—which included DFW's seventh—with an additional 15 runways either proposed or under construction, including DFW's eighth. With the increasing number of delays occurring around the country, building *only six new runways in 10 years* simply will not be enough to help alleviate the congestion at our Nation's airports.

Moreover, of the 15 runways that are either proposed or under construction, most of them will not be operational for several years, assuming current projections hold. For the most part, the blame for the delays in building new runways and increasing capacity at our Nation's airports rests with the laborious and time-consuming environmental review process—a process that can take years to complete and that *must be finalized* before construction of a new runway can begin.

Not surprisingly then, Senator Hutchison, DFW Airport is fully supportive of your effort in the Aviation Delay Prevention Act to expedite the environmental review process.

This legislation could not have come at a more opportune time. DFW Airport is poised to begin preliminary work on the Airport's planned eighth runway this year. This will involve a revalidation of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The EIS studies for the Airport's east and west runways—the Airport's seventh and soon-to-be eighth—were conducted and approved in the early 1990s.

In fact, the FAA's Record of Decision for Runways 16/34 East and 16/34 West, which was issued on April 6, 1992, was the culmination of *three and one half years* of environmental effort by DFW Airport and the FAA. At that time, the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the two new runways was one of the most comprehensive environmental efforts ever conducted for new aviation facilities in the U.S.

In addition to the three and one half years it took to complete the EIS, the process was further delayed by two years due to legal challenges, another year for the runway's design process and still another two years for the construction process. From beginning to end, it took DFW Airport nearly *10 years* to have our seventh runway in place and operational, with the majority of this time taken up by the environmental review process.

This extended comment review period granted the FAA and the DOT during DFW's early 1990s EIS study—which is routinely granted the FAA and DOT—has resulted in delays, not only in terms of extending the project schedules but, ultimately, in terms of airline arrival and departure delays. A runway project that should have opened in 1990-91 was not completed until September 1996.

Under the current federal environmental review process, DFW Airport will have to wait until 2007 to open our eighth runway, and that is only if DFW Airport is able to begin the EIS revalidation process *this year*.

Our experience with our seventh runway and our desire to build our eighth runway in a more expedited manner led us to partner with the American Association of Airport Executives (AAAE) and Airports Council International-North America (ACI-NA) and propose legislation to Congress earlier this month.

The proposed legislation—our Expedited Airport System Enhancement initiative, also known by its acronym EASE—will accelerate the FAA review process so that work on crucial capacity-enhancing projects, such as DFW Airport's eighth runway, can be completed much sooner than the current system allows.

Under ACI/AAAE's EASE legislation, the FAA would be called upon to identify "critical national airport capacity" projects such as DFW's eighth runway. FAA and all agencies that conduct environmental reviews would be expected to give these "critical" projects the highest priority.

Other provisions of EASE would require states to accommodate these critical airport projects when they draft regional air pollution reduction plans for areas that fail to meet National air quality standards. EASE would also loosen FAA restrictions on use of local airport funds for environmental mitigation in neighboring communities.

We commend the provisions of EASE for the Subcommittee's consideration as an integral part of its final Bill.

DFW Airport also fully and completely supports any legislation that will expedite and coordinate the environmental review process and that will ensure that reviews are done concurrently and not consecutively, as called for in Senator Hutchison's Aviation Delay Prevention Act. DFW Airport is also fully supportive of completing all environmental reviews by a date certain, thereby ensuring that the current practice of extending the comment review period by the FAA and the DOT is not allowed to continue.

I note, Senator Hutchison, that the Administration agrees with you on the need for environmental streamlining. DOT Secretary Mineta, in an address to the Aero Club of Washington last week, came out in favor of such action. To quote the Secretary, "we think we can, in many instances, conduct state and federal environmental assessments simultaneously, rather than consecutively, and save months if not years in the process."

Airline Scheduling Practices

DFW Airport is also supportive of the provision in Senator Hutchison's bill that calls for further study of possible remedies for alleviating airport congestion, such as congestion mitigation fees to be paid by the airlines.

DFW Airport is not necessarily an advocate of imposing a congestion mitigation fee on airlines for overscheduling practices during peak hours. While I believe that a fee may serve as a deterrent for overscheduling, we should remember that there is still the issue of supply and demand: airlines would not schedule flights—profitable flights during peak hours—if there was not a demand for the flights. Rather,

I believe the best, most surefire method for meeting the increase in flights is to accommodate them *by increasing capacity* at our airports.

Fortunately, DFW Airport has the landmass to support additional infrastructure and development. However, a congestion mitigation fee may be supported by those airports that simply do not have the available space to build the necessary infrastructure, leaving them with no choice but to control congestion through the imposition of a fee upon airlines that continue to overschedule flights during peak hours.

I commend you, Senator Hutchison, and this Subcommittee for its farsightedness on this issue, and I look forward to the report and recommendations.

Passenger Facility Charge (PFC) Terminal Eligibility

Finally, I would like to address a critical capacity and funding issue with you today that is not addressed in the legislation, as drafted, but that I hope will be included in a subsequent version of this bill.

PFCs have been enormously valuable to airports to help construct new runways and terminal gates over the past 10 years. But we would urge you to add to your Bill provisions that would broaden PFC eligibility to allow airports to construct the *basic shell* of terminal buildings. There is little consolation in building gates if airports cannot build the structures that house the gates.

DFW tried last year in AIR-21 to expand PFC eligibility to include the building of the shell of a new terminal building. If PFC monies can only be used to build 80 percent of a new terminal, then an airport must go to the bond market to finance the remaining 20 percent. This may require prior approval of the airline tenants, which can delay the project and further jeopardize the needed new capacity. However, if the entire shell is eligible for PFC funding, then airports can build new capacity much more rapidly. Simply

put, if we are to have new airport terminal capacity online to meet the FAA forecasts, then we need to broaden the PFC eligibility definition for airport terminals and gates.

Conclusion

There is little doubt among members of the aviation community that the escalating delays and cancellations will continue unless and until we can, collectively, address the problems with solutions that will work.

Ladies and gentlemen, I cannot emphasize enough that the single most effective method to reduce delays at our Nation's airports—short of regulating airline scheduling practices or capping demand—is to *increase capacity.*

Airport operators need the funding and the flexibility to build additional runways, terminals and gate space to handle the dynamic aviation growth that is expected in the coming years. In short, while airports cannot control flight delays and cancellations, I firmly believe that by adding the necessary runway and terminal infrastructure and expediting the environmental review process, we will, in the long run, be able to mitigate a great deal of the congestion that is plaguing our system today.

On behalf of the Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport, I look forward to working with this Subcommittee and others in Congress to bring these ideas to fruition. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today.