

**Statement of Ronald Swanda  
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**Before the Subcommittee on Aviation  
Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee  
United States Senate**

**Hearing on Aviation Delay Prevention  
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Madame Chair, Senator Rockefeller, and members of the Subcommittee, my name is Ron Swanda and I am Vice President, Operations of the General Aviation Manufacturers Association (GAMA). GAMA represents approximately 50 manufacturers of general aviation aircraft, engine, avionics and component parts located throughout the United States.

**GENERAL AVIATION**

As everyone on this Subcommittee well knows, general aviation is defined as all aviation other than commercial and military aviation. General aviation is the backbone of our air transportation system and the primary training ground for the commercial airline industry. It is also an industry that contributes significantly to our nation's economy.

General aviation aircraft range from small, single-engine planes to mid-size turboprops to the larger turbofans capable of flying non-stop from New York to Tokyo. These aircraft are used for everything from emergency medical evacuations to border patrols to fire fighting.

They are also used by individuals, companies, state governments, universities and other interests to quickly and efficiently reach the more than 5000 small and rural communities in the United States that are not served by commercial airlines. General aviation allows these thousands of small communities to access the global marketplace.

**IMPORTANCE OF TRANSPORTATION**

I would like to thank the Subcommittee for holding today's hearing. It is timely and relevant.

Madame Chair, the quality of life of all Americans and strength of our nation's economy is inextricably linked to our nation's transportation system.

There is nothing new in that statement. Economists and historians have long understood the connection between the quality of a nation's transportation system and the strength of its economy. However, I think it is a statement worth making today because of the critical juncture at which we find ourselves with regard to our air transportation system.

## **DEMAND FOR AIR TRAVEL**

For the better part of the past decade, demand for air transportation in the United States has been growing at a remarkable rate. Since the early 90s, the number of airline passengers has increased by approximately 40 percent and the number of freight ton-miles flown has increased 90 percent. General aviation—which just a decade ago was in serious decline—has just posted its sixth straight year of growth.

FAA projects that demand for air transportation will continue to grow well into the foreseeable future. What is uncertain, however, is whether or not our country will take the steps necessary to accommodate that demand.

As everyone on this Committee well knows, the growing demand for air transportation has clearly begun to run up against capacity constraints at a handful of airports in our national system. The delays created at those airports are having a significant ripple effect all across the United States.

As a country, we now have to ask ourselves how we are going to respond to this situation.

## **EXPANDING CAPACITY**

Are we going to do what is necessary to increase capacity in order to safely meet demand, and thereby enjoy the benefits that come from a free flow of people, goods and services? Or are we going to constrain or manage demand, and hope that the techniques we employ do not do too much harm?

The General Aviation Manufacturers Association is pleased that legislation we are discussing today includes a provision to implement an expedited coordinated environmental review process for airport capacity-enhancement projects. We view that provision as a sign that Congress is interested in expanding capacity to meet demand, and there is certainly no more effective way to do that than building new runways at capacity constrained airports.

As you know, new technologies and new procedures are being developed that can increase system efficiency. GPS, Datalink, ADS-B and WAAS/LAAS can be very helpful in our efforts to increase capacity. All of these technologies are important building blocks for improving our evolving air system.

We hope that they will be certified in the very near future. However, we should be careful not to raise expectations for technological solutions beyond what they can deliver.

Mitre, NASA, and other technical organizations have reviewed all of the capacity-enhancing technologies and procedures that are on the drawing board and have concluded that the cumulative effect of fielding all of these technologies would increase capacity by roughly 5 to 15 percent. Now a 5 to 15 percent increase in capacity is important and should be vigorously pursued. However, it is not enough to enable us to meet the growing demand for air transportation. That will take a much greater effort by all of us.

## **SET A CAPACITY GOAL**

Increasing the capacity of our nation's air transportation system must be made a national priority. We need to set a goal for increasing capacity over a finite period of time and develop a plan for attaining it.

The United States has a proven record of rising to the challenge when the goal is clearly defined. Remember that forty years ago we set out to put a man on the moon and we accomplished the task in less than ten years. If we could do that then, we can no doubt meet the challenge the travelling public is presenting to us today—we can increase capacity of our air transportation system to safely meet demand.

Congress has already provided important tools in this regard. AIR 21 substantially increased AIP funding and made significant changes in the managerial structure of the FAA. Now we must make a national commitment to using those tools to keep the US air transportation system the largest, safest and most efficient in the world.

## **RATIONING DEMAND**

As much as GAMA supports efforts to increase capacity, it is concerned about ideas that seek to constrain or manage demand.

We agree with Transportation Secretary Norm Mineta who has called demand management “an admission of failure that harms the economy and the travelling public.”

One particular method of constraining or managing demand is what is known as peak hour pricing. Under this form of demand management, busy airports would be allowed to charge exorbitant landing fees on a per aircraft basis.

GAMA opposes peak hour pricing for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is that it represents government reregulation of air transportation. By allowing peak hour pricing at certain airports, the US government would once again be sanctioning a system for artificially determining what cities get service and what type of airplanes will be used to provide that service.

Under peak hour pricing, the government's control over air transportation might not be quite as direct as it was prior to 1978 when it set specific rates and schedules. But it is clear that peak hour pricing would effectively eliminate service to small communities by pricing general aviation and commuter airlines out of those markets. New entrant carriers would also suffer because they could not absorb the exorbitant landing fees over a broad network of operations. Even the major carriers would find that the system forces them to use larger planes than market conditions would otherwise warrant.

We recognize that some members of this Committee support the idea of government reregulation of air transportation. However, our understanding is that their reason for supporting reregulation is so that service to small markets might be improved.

The irony of peak hour pricing is that it is government reregulation but with a twist. It is government reregulation that eliminates—rather than improves—service to small and rural communities.

The fact that peak hour pricing favors service to and from only those large markets that can support big jets full of people means that businesses that need to reach major cities will themselves need to be located in one. As a result, sprawl and the other problems associated with our nation's biggest cities will be exacerbated rather than reduced. And the promise that advances in telecommunication technology once held for our nation's smaller communities will be dashed because quality air service will not exist.

There is also a question as to what an airport will do with the fees it raises. Will it invest in new runways to eventually meet demand and thereby eliminate the need for peak hour fees? Or will it use the largess it receives from not meeting demand to simply gold plate its facilities for those big city passengers who can afford service?

The general aviation community is not concerned about peak hour pricing or other demand management ideas because we have a large number of airplanes going into the busiest airports—we don't. In fact, general aviation makes up less than four percent of the traffic at the five busiest airports. We prefer to use reliever airports when they are a practical alternative.

Moreover, what little general aviation there is at the major airports often does not arrive or depart at the same time as the airline banks. And, in places like Reagan National Airport, we use runways that are not long enough to handle the traffic from the major airlines.

Still, we think it is important for general aviation to have at least some reasonable level of access to commercial airports. General aviation is used by companies and individuals in small and rural communities to reach big cities or to connect with the passenger airlines. DOT studies show that every airport in the United States has at least some unused capacity every day. With that being the case, what is wrong with general aviation turning that unused capacity into important air service?

General aviation also feels it is important that we maintain a reasonable level of access to the commercial airports because our nation's system of reliever airports is, in some areas, under attack.

Examples include Chicago's Meigs Field, where this important downtown airport is slated to be turned into a park next year. And in Denver, an apartment complex was just built at the end of a runway of one the country's busiest general aviation airports.

## **CONCLUSION**

Madame Chair, as I said at the beginning of my testimony, general aviation is a vital link in our nation's air transportation system and an important engine for our nation's economy. As such we are anxious to work with the Committee on efforts that will keep the United States the world leader in all aspects of aviation now and in the future.

Growth in demand for air transportation has brought us to a critical juncture in our nation's aviation history. We hope that Congress will take this opportunity to commit our country to expanding our air transportation infrastructure to meet the demand of its citizens. We stand ready to assist in that effort and look forward to working with you and the other members of this Committee to do just that.