STATEMENT OF SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION
WILLIAM T. COLEMAN, JR. ON THE CONCORDE DECISION
BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON AVIATION, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 1976.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I appreciate your invitation to appear to discuss my decision permitting British Airways and Air France to conduct limited scheduled Concorde operations to and from the United States for a trial period up to 16 months under certain precise restrictions. I would stress "up to 16 months." For the trial period can be cancelled on four months notice or indeed forthwith if at any time the Secretary of Transportation believes there exists a threat to the health, safety or welfare of the American people.

Few decisions I have made as Secretary of Transportation have caused me greater concern than this one. I have considered strongly-held public views about aircraft noise, with which I share a deep and continuing concern. I have had to weigh the obligations of international fairness and reciprocity, recognizing that the United States, which has produced almost 95% of the aircraft in service in the free world today, has been the primary beneficiary of this 30 year old international structure. I have attempted to evaluate the benefits of a new technology, recognizing my obviously limited ability to predict the future -- to determine whether the

harsh realities of the market place make feasible private investment in the development of a clean, quiet, energy efficient second generation of SSTs that could be the aircraft of the future.

These considerations cannot be completely reconciled in reaching a decision -- if by reconciliation one means a decision that will receive universal acclaim -- but their significance for today's generation and their consequences for tomorrow's has been articulated, weighed, and evaluated. There was no common denominator by which I could compare the values I have assigned to each. My task was further complicated by the fact that some of the values involved can be described and quantified with precision, while others, equally important to their advocates, are more hypothetical, speculative and subjective. It would be plain error, however, to ignore or discount a value simply because it cannot be reduced to numbers. And it would be error still plainer to imagine we can escape decision because decision is difficult.

Whether or not you agree with my decision - - and I expect it has not met with unalloyed acclaim in any quarter - - I hope you will at least agree that it has been made openly and in accordance with our democratic traditions.

I welcome the continuation of a public dialogue about the Concorde - - based on the facts as confidently as we can ascertain them

and as clearly as we can express them. But let us deal with facts -- let's apply them with compassion and with understanding for the people who benefit and, more importantly, for the people who may be adversely affected. Because there is so much we still do not know — about the subjective human response to Concorde's actual unique noise characteristics rather than the response to its pre-arrival publicity; about the commercial viability of this new technology; about the delicate ecological balance of the ozone; about the benefit of increased travel time and reduced jet lag. For these reasons and for reasons of international fairness, I believe the demonstration period, under the strict controls and limitations set forth in my opinion, is in the national interest. I welcome your support for it and your participation in the discussion of the information that is derived from it. I believe we should give the Concorde this limited chance to prove itself.

It may well be that further development of this technology is not economically sensible in the energy and environmentally conscious period in which we live. If so, then the Concorde will fail because it is an anachronism, and its failure will be recognized as such rather than attributed to an arbitrary and protectionist attitude of the United States out of fear that our dominance of the world aeronautical manufacturing market is threatened.

I have enough confidence in this nation's environmental commitment and in the objective judgment of the market place to be sure that if the SST does in fact become the aircraft of the future, it will only be because man will have developed the technology to meet environmental standards and to enable the SST to compete in the market place effectively. But if we bar the Concorde completely, we may well be condemning for all time or delaying for decades what might be a very significant technological advance for mankind.

The question whether the six flights are to be permitted to continue beyond the 16th month will be decided after careful analysis, based on the facts we have gathered, and without any presumption either way being created by my present decision. But it is my conviction that we will then be in a position to make a reasonable judgment, based on actual operating experience, that will be fair to all parties affected by it and fair to the future generations who will live with our decision.

I believe that copies of the opinion and my opening statement at the press conference at which it was announced were provided to you on the day of the decision. However, I would like to submit them now for the record. I hope you have had the opportunity to read the opinion and to study the material it contains. I shall be happy to try to answer any questions you may have.

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