

STATEMENT OF ROBERT AARONSON, ASSOCIATE ADMINISTRATOR FOR AIRPORTS, FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION, BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS AND TRANSPORTATION, SUBCOMMITTEE ON AVIATION, CONCERNING THE PROPOSED METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON AIRPORTS POLICY. JUNE 19, 1980.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I welcome the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the Department of Transportation's proposed policy governing Washington National and Dulles International Airports. I also appreciate your expressed interest in discussing the adequacy of police protection at the Airports and the adequacy of current provisions for funding maintenance at the Airports as well. With me are Jim Wilding, Director of FAA's Metropolitan Washington Airports, and Clark Onstad, FAA's Chief Counsel.

Before discussing our proposed policy, I want to point out that the period for public comment has closed for this proposal. We are concerned that our appearance today not be misconstrued as a prejudgment of the final rulemaking. I want to emphasize that a final rule will be promulgated only after a full analysis of all public comment received during the notice period. What we would like to do today is to explain our proposed policy and provide the Subcommittee with our rationale for that proposal. We agree with the Subcommittee that there

should be no inconsistency with the Administrative Procedures Act in offering those explanations.

Since our proposed policy for the Metropolitan Washington Airports has received wide distribution, I will quickly highlight the purpose of the policy effort and features of the policy proposal.

The Department of Transportation has, for almost 10 years, been seeking to establish an appropriate policy to guide the FAA's management and operation of National and Dulles Airports. Once a policy defining a role for each airport is in place, it will then be possible for the Department to move ahead with long overdue improvements to the facilities at National, while continuing to make timely improvements to Dulles.

It's important to recognize the extent of public involvement there has been in shaping a policy for the Airports. During the past decade, we have met on countless occasions with virtually every segment of the community. We have met repeatedly with representatives of the aviation community, the Council of Governments, the National Capital Planning Commission, elected officials, and citizens groups.

For example, in 1977, we held six public hearings in which we heard from hundreds of persons about local noise problems. In 1978, when we issued a draft Environmental Impact Statement concerning a proposed Metropolitan Airports Policy, we distributed that draft throughout the community, as well as to affected persons in other communities. We held four public hearings, attended by approximately 400 persons. We received nearly 1,000 written comments from local and state governments, from Members of Congress, from chambers of commerce, from the aviation industry, from citizen's groups, and from the general public. All those comments were assessed before our current proposal was issued. With respect to the current proposed policy, we have held three public hearings. Those hearings were attended by nearly 300 people. We have received approximately 500 written comments on the proposal, all of which will be carefully reviewed before a final policy is issued.

When you consider all the input we have received over the years in formal and informal sessions, the hundreds of pages of transcripts we have reviewed, the 1,500 written comments we have received in response to our proposals, and the continuing dialogue we have had with affected persons, it is apparent that there has been substantial participation by the public in formulating a policy for the Airports.

I'd like to focus briefly on the need for a policy. The Washington/Baltimore area is served by three major airports, two of which--National and Dulles--are operated by the Department of Transportation. The third, Baltimore-Washington International, is operated by the State of Maryland. While Dulles and Baltimore-Washington International are relatively free of significant problems, National is not.

National handles the majority of air passengers in this region--almost 7 out of every 10. That has created substantial noise problems in portions of the region. Many residents, and their local governments as well, see the concentration of the region's flight activity at National as an unnecessary and unwarranted burden, particularly with the availability of the area's two other larger and relatively underutilized airports.

The facilities at National, some of which are 40 years old, have become seriously overburdened by the heavy passenger volume, with consequent declines in the service provided to airport users. Portions of the terminal complex, including the entire North Terminal and the utility systems, are in need of major redevelopment. The present airport road network is not adequate to handle the demands being placed on it, and there are more efficient ways to deal with the airport traffic.

Automobile parking facilities are limited, and major facility changes are needed to make the Metro station convenient to the terminal. Many of the Airport's facilities are simply outdated. There is little need to elaborate on the need for substantial improvements at National since that need is readily apparent to anyone who has been there.

Over the next decade, the number of air passengers in this region will increase more than 60 percent over today's level. It is imperative that full consideration be given to directing much of that future growth away from National to Dulles and Baltimore-Washington Airports. This will enable us to eventually rebuild National into a facility in which we can all take pride. Attempting to accommodate the majority of future growth at National will only result in a worsening noise problem, continued deterioration in the levels of service offered to air passengers, more terminal and roadway congestion, and the continued physical deterioration of National's landside facilities.

Let me quickly sketch out the major elements of the proposed policy.

ROLE OF DULLES

Our policy proposes that Dulles will continue to provide all types of air transportation service to the Washington area, with capacity added as needed. The original purpose of the Dulles Access Road will be retained by permitting only limited exceptions to the longstanding practice of allowing the use of the road only for access to the Airport. We will also undertake to promote and improve public transportation to the Airport.

GROWTH AT NATIONAL

We are proposing to control future passenger growth at National and have proposed a permanent limit on the number of annual passengers served at 18 million. Comments suggesting other limits have been received and are being seriously evaluated. The rate of growth would be reduced immediately by a reduction in the number of slots allocated to certificated air carriers at National.

REDUCTION IN OPERATING SLOTS

We have proposed a continuation of the 60 total IFR slots at National per hour. Within that total of hourly slots, we would

limit certificated air carriers to no more than 36 schedules (whether take-off or landing) per hour between 7:00 a.m. and 8:59 p.m.; and no more than 18 between 9:00 p.m. and 9:30 p.m. Commuter air carrier schedules would be increased from the present eight hourly slots to either 1) 12 per hour between 7:00 a.m. and 8:59 p.m. with six between 9:00 p.m. and 9:30 p.m., or 2) 15 operations between 7:00 a.m. and 8:59 p.m. with eight between 9:00 p.m. and 9:30 p.m. If the commuter slots are increased to 15, three operating slots would be deducted from the allocation to the general aviation user class.

PERIMETER RULE

We have proposed the formal definition of a nonstop service perimeter at National to preserve the Airport's medium and short-haul status. We have proposed two alternatives for the perimeter rule: 1) The existing 650-mile limit with a continued exemption of the seven grandfathered cities located beyond that limit but within 1,000 miles; or 2) A 1,000-mile limitation applying to all cities equally.

REDUCTION IN HOURS OF OPERATION AT NATIONAL

We are proposing that the airport be closed to all traffic after 10:30 p.m. and before 7:00 a.m., except for emergencies.

Certificated and commuter carriers would be permitted to schedule operations from 7:00 a.m. until 9:30 p.m.

USE OF WIDE-BODY AIRCRAFT

We are proposing that the current policy constraint against two- and three-engine wide-body aircraft at National be removed. The prohibition on four-engine jet aircraft operations at National would continue. Until there is a redevelopment of the Airport's facilities, the final decision on the use of wide-body aircraft by any operator would be made by the Director of Metropolitan Washington Airports. Before those decisions could be made, an evaluation of the requesting air carrier's proposed operating plan would be undertaken and the ultimate decision based upon the proposed operation's compatibility with the Airport facility.

I should add that the FAA's Office of Flight Operations evaluated the operation of wide-body aircraft at National from the safety perspective. Actual flights, using the DC-10 and A-300, were monitored and evaluated by FAA inspectors to consider a variety of factors such as approach acceptability and terminal area maneuverability. Those wide-body operations were concluded to be safe. Other wide-body aircraft would be

similarly evaluated to assure safe operation before permission would be granted to use the Airport.

Those are the elements of the policy proposal. Now, let me expand on what they will mean.

The curfew would lessen the impact of noise at National by curtailing operations during those hours when the annoyance from noise is greatest or, put another way, when the ambient noise is lower. The introduction of wide-bodied aircraft at National will permit a shift in service to more environmentally acceptable and more fuel efficient aircraft. Efforts to increase the acceptability of Dulles as an alternative to National will reduce the burden placed on National and its neighbors. Reductions in the number of hourly certificated carrier slots, coupled with a cap on passenger traffic at National, will provide future environmental relief.

Our policy deals with the demand of smaller communities within 650 miles for service to Washington. Commuters are available in many cases to meet that demand, but with the slot allocations in effect at National there have not been adequate slots to permit commuters to provide the small community service. The proposed increase in the number of commuter slots

would enable greater service to Washington from smaller communities.

Increased commuter slots would reinforce substantially the policy decision that National should remain a short- and medium-haul airport, with Dulles International and Baltimore-Washington International available for long-haul domestic or international flights. Dulles and BWI have plenty of capacity available to meet added flights that may be occasioned by reduced certificated carrier slots at National in the next few years.

The adoption of a perimeter rule, thereby codifying in regulations the existing practice at National or one similar to it, furthers the policy decision to preserve the short/medium-haul nature of the airport by formalizing the perimeter rule. The 650-mile rule with the seven exceptions, if adopted, would merely ratify a practice in effect at National since the 1960's. The 1,000 mile perimeter rule responds to the concerns that permitting nonstop service to some cities beyond 650 miles but within 1,000 miles discriminates against other cities similarly situated but lacking "grandfather" rights.

I would like to point out to the Subcommittee that FAA's Metropolitan Washington Airports are government operations that are currently returning revenues in excess of costs to the Treasury. There are reasons for this. First, we operate the Airports as efficiently as possible, using business as well as public service principles. We provide a service and we charge for that service. Second, revenues from the Airports are deposited in the Treasury while funds for capital improvements must be appropriated. We have not made significant capital improvements at National in recent years.

In anticipation of future investments at the Airports, the Department of Transportation has under review the feasibility of different financing mechanisms for the Airports. No decision has yet been reached as to whether a different means of financing might be more desirable than the current approach. However, the subject is receiving close scrutiny, and is but one measure of the importance we attach to improving the future operations of our Metropolitan Airports.

As for the Subcommittee's interest in the adequacy of FAA's airport police, this is a subject that has been of long-standing concern to us. Over a period of years, we have

had difficulty in recruiting and retaining high quality police officers at the Airports. While this problem has not been solved, the staffing differential provision of the Administration's pay reform proposal would be instrumental in helping to solve our problem as well as problems experienced by other Federal agencies employing law enforcement personnel. In the interim, we are exploring with the Office of Personnel Management other means of improving our ability to recruit and retain well qualified police officers.

Mr. Chairman, that completes my prepared statement. My associates and I would be pleased to respond to questions you may have at this time.