

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE LANGHORNE M. BOND, FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS, SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT, CONCERNING FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT. FEBRUARY 28, 1980.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I welcome the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the FAA's Facilities and Equipment (F&E) Program. I am pleased that the Subcommittee has held a number of hearings over the last two years on this subject since I believe the importance of the F&E Program to our airport and airway system fully warrants such close scrutiny by the Congress.

I am well aware of the Subcommittee's concern that not enough has been done to improve the safety of our system by installing facilities and equipment. I share that concern. Accident experience shows that approach and landing is the highest risk phase of flight, and this is the flight regime served by many of the navigation aids provided through our F&E Program. This indicates the need to better equip our Nation's airports with visual aids, such as VASIs and lighting systems, and with precision aids. But, I also want to state that I believe the record clearly shows that a lot of improvements have been made to the system. Since the creation of the Airport and Airway Trust Fund in 1970 through fiscal year 1980, over \$2.5 billion

has been appropriated for the F&E Program and over \$4 billion through our airport grant program for system improvements. As a result of these investments, our system is better equipped with more sophisticated equipment today than it has ever been before.

While we have devoted a large amount of resources to improving the national airspace system, this Subcommittee has focused recently on one key issue: how effective we have been at getting these resources to the facilities that are served by the commuter carriers. Our records show that the commuters serve roughly 750 airports in the continental United States, Alaska, and Hawaii, though the number of airports doesn't remain constant due to changing patterns in commuter usage. At the last hearing before this Subcommittee, we described the facilities and equipment at the network of airports served by the commuters. You will recall that the numbers we cited showed in most cases 50% or more of the airports equipped with facilities and equipment such as ILS's, VASI's, runway end identification lights, and the like. These efforts indicate resources well spent in the effort to provide the facilities needed for a safe, reliable national air transportation system. There is, however, an area where I am seriously concerned and that is with the airports served only by the commuters. These airports comprise over 40% of the approximately 750 airports I just described. At the airports

served solely by commuters, 67% do not have a VASI installed; 87% do not have an ILS; 92% are not served by a tower; 67.5% do not have radar approach control provided; 99% do not have airport surveillance radars; 88% do not have approach lights; and 73% do not have runway end identification lights. Significantly, over 50% of these airports served solely by commuters have none of these aids in place. This record reflects our allocation of resources to locations with the highest demands and highlights the dilemma we face in programming finite resources throughout the system.

Therefore, despite the many good things we have done for the system, I am the first to acknowledge that we need to do more in the future. Not only do we have new patterns of airport usage brought on by the emergence of the commuters but we're faced today with a fuel crisis that is compounded by airport capacity problems and delays; our skies are more crowded today than ever before, and traffic will increase; our air traffic system computers will just not be up to the task of meeting the air traffic demands for additional automation in the future.

We are working in the FAA to assess the challenges our system will be facing both in the near term and the long term, and to develop workable solutions. There are, of course, many ways in which safety can be improved--intense surveillance, tough

enforcement, stringent regulations, as well as F&E type improvements to the system. I believe our record in the last few years shows progress across the board in these areas.

In trying to make improvements to the system, I am constrained in my choices by limitations that are placed on available resources, and by two considerations that confront any government manager: (1) deciding where improvements will do the most good; and (2) setting a reasonable threshold of benefits estimated from the improvements so that an investment in one area doesn't sacrifice greater benefits from alternative investments.

I am fully aware that many of the Members of this Subcommittee, as well as others in the aviation community, continue to focus on the uncommitted balance of the Trust Fund as if it were a blank check that I could fill in. It's not, and for that matter even if it were there would still not be enough money to equip all airports in the system with all facilities or aids in our inventory. I think we all agree that not every airport in the system needs to be equipped with sophisticated navigational aids, but there still remain realistic needs that should be met in the system.

I am charged with the responsibility of promoting aviation safety. It's a responsibility I do not take lightly. But the

way I discharge this duty is not left to my unfettered discretion--nor should it be. There are legal and fiscal constraints that guide my actions, but I believe we have done a good job of selecting those items which pay the greatest dividends in safety and increased capacity. Since all possible needs of the system cannot be met, we have prescribed stringent operational rules to maintain safety at airports not equipped with sophisticated navigational aids. Therefore, if those rules are followed, the primary impact of the lack of aids at an airport should be a diminished capacity which may contribute to system delays, not a derogation of safety.

The Congress has prescribed guidelines and procedures which treat the fiscal and budgetary needs of our nation in a unified manner. There are many demands which our country must meet and the programs designed to meet those demands compete for funds which are limited by a ceiling. That forces tough choices by the Executive Branch and by the Congress.

I am an advocate of aviation safety, and that is what I was appointed to be. Though as any citizen I have my own feelings about the full range of issues which confront Americans, my responsibility under law is to devote my energy toward improving the safety of our national air transportation system. I have done that to the fullest extent of my ability.

But in focusing on aviation safety, I am not expected to make decisions about the full range of non-aviation programs. In the budget process, there are those who have to balance the needs of highway safety, automobile safety, the railway system, and maritime needs. And there are others who have to then consider the needs of our transportation system as a whole in the context of a wide range of social, energy, and defense programs. The Congress then bears the ultimate responsibility for making the same types of hard choices. This same decision-making process takes place every year.

Recognizing then that there will always be limitations on the resources available to us, it has been up to the FAA to decide what kinds of expenditures will go farthest toward meeting the needs of aviation safety and to programmatically meet those needs. In terms of our F&E Program, we have developed establishment criteria, utilizing a cost/benefit approach, that are designed to help us allocate limited resources by telling us when an airport in the system should have a given type of facility or equipment installed. We have not let these establishment criteria, however, stand in our way in terms of meeting special needs at an airport which does not meet the criteria. A good example of that is the special satellite airport program I initiated. The aim of this program is to reduce the mix of high-performance and low-performance aircraft

at air carrier airports. This is done by developing strategically located airports with greater facilities and equipment that will draw the lower performance aircraft away from the air carrier facilities.

There is nothing sacrosanct about the current establishment criteria we have in effect. In fact, several weeks ago, in an appearance before this Subcommittee, my deputy, Quent Taylor, said that we were taking another look at those establishment criteria. We are doing just that to see if they are set at the right levels. I'd like to repeat Quent Taylor's invitation for the Members of this Subcommittee to provide us with their views on our establishment criteria. I would be pleased to have FAA staff fully brief the Subcommittee staff on our existing criteria, should you choose.

I must caution you, though, that reexamination of our facility establishment criteria is no panacea. There will remain the need to establish facilities and equipment where they will do the most good, and there will always be more places than pieces.

I have enclosed to my prepared statement a breakdown of anticipated funding under the FAA's five year F&E Program. The program has been developed to meet what we consider the most pressing needs of the system. Broken down into major

categories, funding levels are as follows: Air Route Traffic Control Facilities--\$496.0 million; Airport Traffic Control Facilities--\$823.8 million; Flight Service Facilities--\$282.2 million; Air Navigation Facilities--\$353.0 million; Housing, Utilities, and Miscellaneous Facilities--\$66.0 million; Aircraft and Related Equipment--\$42.5 million; and Development, Test, and Evaluation Facilities--\$36.5 million. The projected funding over this five year period (FY 1981-85) totals \$2.1 billion which is the level called for in our proposed airport and airway legislation pending before the Congress. As reflected in the narrative discussion at the beginning of the enclosure, program modifications result from a variety of causes. For example, we are just now completing work on a major proposal to modernize our network of flight service stations. We will shortly furnish you an updated five year plan for this \$2.1 billion authorization which will also show year by year detail.

The program we have developed includes a variety of efforts intended to improve existing facilities and to add new facilities to the system. As is readily apparent, the bulk of our program is airport related. Among other things, you will note that funding is contemplated for such things as radar improvements, ILS's, frangible towers, approach lights, wind shear detection equipment, modernizing our flight service

stations, as well as a number of equipment improvements in our towers and centers. Though there will continue to remain needs that have not been met by this program, we have done our best to establish priorities and allocate funding based upon what we see as the most important needs of the system.

As I mentioned a moment ago, our airport and airway legislative proposal would authorize \$2.1 billion in F&E funding for fiscal years 1981-85, and it also calls for increased levels for airport grants which would total \$4.0 billion over the five years of the program. The funding for these key programs is provided by the Airport and Airway Trust Fund which is financed by several forms of taxes on system users. One significant change we have proposed in that taxing structure concerns the tax collected from general aviation users of the system. We have proposed changing the existing 7¢ per gallon tax on aviation fuel to a 10% ad valorem tax. That modification will increase the cost recovery from general aviation.

The reason we have recommended increased taxes on general aviation is our belief that users should pay a proportionate share of the costs of the airport and airway system. Commercial aviation users are paying somewhere around 90% of the costs incurred by the FAA in their behalf. Right now, general aviation users pay some 14% of the costs attributable

to them. Without the kinds of tax proposals we have made, that percentage will decline to less than 10% of the costs attributable to them by 1985. What we propose would increase the recovery of system costs from general aviation users to a maximum of 44% of the costs incurred in their behalf by the FAA. I am concerned about the tax inequity that presently exists between the taxes levied on airline passengers contrasted with those imposed on general aviation users.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I would like to assure you that I share your interest in improving aviation safety and that I will continue to the fullest extent of my abilities to do just that.

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