

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE QUENTIN TAYLOR, DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR  
OF THE FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION, BEFORE THE HOUSE WAYS  
AND MEANS COMMITTEE, SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT, CONCERNING  
COMMUTER AIRLINE SAFETY. FEBRUARY 13, 1980.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today on the subject of commuter airline safety, a subject which warrants the attention of all of us in the aviation community.

Even before the Airline Deregulation Act of 1978, the commuters were growing at a rapid pace. Today, with expanded horizons opened to them from the economic deregulation of the airlines, their growth has even accelerated. All indicators point to a continued growth in the commuter industry.

The increased role the commuters are fulfilling in our national air transportation system underscores the need for substantial improvements in commuter safety. In simple terms, the overall safety record of the commuters has not been good; in fact, I would go so far as to say that a continuation of the same rate of accidents should not and will not be acceptable to the Congress, the FAA, or to the travelling public. It should also

be unacceptable to the majority of commuter operators who are doing their best to provide a needed service safely and who are rightfully concerned that a loss of public confidence in the service they provide will negate the tremendous gains they have recently made in the marketplace. Attached to my prepared statement you will find a statistical breakdown of the commuter accident rate from 1975 through 1979.

The Subcommittee has expressed interest in the kinds of navigation aids that are available at airports served by the commuters. There are over 750 airports served by commuters in the continental United States, Alaska, and Hawaii. The number of such airports is a dynamic figure, however, since there is easy access for commuter entry into new markets. As of August 8, 1979, there were 752 such airports served by the commuters; 42% of which have an air traffic control tower in place; 53% have radar approach control provided; 50% have a partial or full instrument landing system in place; 50% have runway end identification lights; and 66% have visual approach slope indicators.

The vast majority of these aids have been provided through the Facilities and Equipment (F&E) Program. In fact, on a system wide basis, from fiscal year 1975 through 1979, the FAA

installed 157 ILS's, 512 VASI's, 239 REIL's, and 158 approach light systems under the F&E program. In the fiscal year 1981 budget, we have requested funding for 176 projects for ILS's, lighting systems, VASI's, DME's and the like; 92 of those projects, or 52%, are for airports served by commuters.

Some aids have also been funded under our Airport Development Aid Program which was amended in 1976 to provide a specific funding category for "commuter service airports" (those not serving certificated air carriers and enplaning over 2,500 commuter passengers annually). In addition to the \$15,000,000 we have been authorized to obligate annually for commuter service airports, we have also obligated approximately \$32,250,000 in air carrier discretionary funds to these airports for a variety of projects.

For the most part, though, facilities and equipment have been allocated to the busier airports, a number of which also serve certificated air carriers, and the commuter funding in ADAP, by virtue of its 2,500 passenger enplanement requirement, is keyed to the busier airports. For those airports with a limited amount of scheduled service and a small number of annual passenger enplanements, the high costs associated with Federal installation and maintenance of facilities such as towers,

radars, instrument landing systems, and the like typically cannot be justified given the need to allocate finite facilities and equipment resources throughout the system. We are, however, undertaking a review of our current facilities and equipment establishment criteria, which are based primarily on a cost/benefit approach. As one part of that review, we are looking at the "benefits" we confer on commuter operations to see if they are high enough. We would be pleased to have FAA staff brief the Subcommittee staff on our present criteria and would welcome the views of the Subcommittee on this issue.

We are well aware of the concerns of the Subcommittee, as well as those expressed by other Members of Congress, about the uncommitted balance in the Trust Fund. We have attempted to address that problem, in part, by recommending increased funding in our proposed airport and airway legislation currently pending before the Congress.

Under that proposal, F&E authorizations would be set at \$350 million for fiscal year 1981, and would increase by \$35 million each subsequent year through the end of fiscal year 1985, accounting for a total of \$2.1 billion for F&E authorizations over the five years of our proposal. Airport grant levels

would also be increased. They would increase to \$700 million in fiscal year 1981 and be phased upward to \$900 million in fiscal year 1985, with a total funding level of \$4 billion over the five year life of the program. Despite these increases, though, it is clear that every airport in the system served by a commuter will not be equipped with sophisticated navigational aids; we will always need to prioritize our use of F&E funds to meet the highest demands of the system.

The absence of specific navigation aids or facilities at a given airport, however, does not make operations into that airport unsafe. To the contrary, we prescribe procedures that take into account what facilities are present and, if complied with, those procedures will result in a safe operation. The area of compliance, however, has proven to be a matter of concern to us. In too many cases, we have found commuter operators who were apparently willing to sacrifice safety, by ignoring prescribed landing minimums or weight and balance requirements or other important safety requirements, in favor of economic gain. Such disregard of safe operations is a problem that will not be resolved by additional navigational aids or facilities.

Our intensified enforcement program, announced by Administrator Bond last March, is intended to capture the full attention of those in the aviation community who might be enticed to tradeoff safety for profits. I expect many of you have read of the substantial civil penalties we have recently assessed for violations of our safety regulations. We have also taken action against the certificates of operators found to have unacceptable safety practices. I believe there is little doubt now in the aviation community that we expect our safety regulations to be followed. Greater compliance will clearly lead to a higher level of safety in all facets of our air transportation system.

In the recent past, we promulgated a new set of regulations (referred to as new Part 135 of the Federal Aviation Regulations) that have substantially bolstered the rules under which the commuters operate. These regulations have strengthened the requirements for commuters in a number of areas such as equipment requirements, pilot proficiency, and maintenance programs. Final certification of the commuters under these stringent requirements was completed just a little over two months ago so it's still too early to see the full impact of these regulations, but they will go far toward

helping the commuters achieve a level of safety approximating that of the certificated airlines.

A key aspect of the implementation of these new commuter rules is a one year program of intensified surveillance of all phases of the commuters' operations to assure that the rules are fully complied with. During the period July 1 to December 31, 1979, for the 280 passenger-carrying commuters which were certificated under new Part 135, we accomplished the following actions under this program: 1775 proficiency checks of pilots-in-command; 288 reviews of ground and flight training; 1087 en route inspections; 198 reviews of operators' Approved Weight and Balance Programs; 1577 ramp inspections of aircraft; 723 spot inspections of aircraft; and 130 reviews of operators' maintenance training. This special surveillance program will continue for each operator for one full year after its certification under the new rules.

Another avenue we are pursuing to improve the safety of the commuters is to develop a new regulatory structure which can be used for the certification of commuter-sized aircraft. These standards will be incorporated in Part 24 of the Federal Aviation Regulations and should lay the foundation for

modernizing and improving the structural and mechanical integrity of the commuter fleet of the future. In so doing, the safety of the aircraft used by the commuters will be enhanced.

In addition to the regulatory and enforcement activities we have initiated to improve the commuters, we have also reassessed the way we do business within the FAA and have made some significant changes. The position of Associate Administrator for Aviation Standards was created to exercise central direction over many of our aviation safety programs and to assure greater coordination than in the past. With respect to commuters, the responsibility for commuter programs at Headquarters has been moved from the division responsible for general aviation safety programs to the Air Transportation Division which is concerned with airline operations. This was done in recognition of the fact that the commuters are more analogous to the airlines than to the general aviation community.

You are also aware, I am sure, of our comprehensive airspace program to implement new Terminal Control Areas and Terminal Radar Service Areas. That program, though not directed solely

at the commuters, will improve the airspace environment for commuters as well as air carriers.

In summary, Mr. Chairman, we have taken a number of steps to deal comprehensively with the need to improve commuter safety. We are confident that our commuter safety program, in combination with other FAA safety programs, will bring about substantial improvements in the commuter safety record.

That completes my prepared statement. My associates and I will be pleased to respond to questions you may have at this time.