

STATEMENT OF BOB SMITH, CHIEF, AIR TRAFFIC DIVISION, WESTERN REGION, FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION, BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY, SUBCOMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION, AVIATION, AND MATERIALS, CONCERNING AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL SAFETY IN THE LOS ANGELES AREA. SEPTEMBER 2, 1981

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to be here today to provide you with an overview of the air traffic control system in the Los Angeles basin. The air traffic in this area is among the heaviest in the nation. The L.A. basin covers 3000 square miles, and contains 14 airports which have FAA control towers, 5 military airports, and 9 private airports without towers. The 19 controlled airports accounted for over 4.6 million operations in 1980. Statistics for 1980 also identified Long Beach, Santa Ana, Van Nuys, Los Angeles International and Torrance Municipal airports among the 20 busiest airports in the United States, with an aggregate traffic count of almost 2,700,000 operations annually. Due to the complexity and geographical location of the airports, Santa Ana and Van Nuys airports are most subject to saturation of airspace. As a result of so much aviation activity in one place, traffic flows in the Los Angeles basin are very complex. I think it would aid the Subcommittee's understanding of these traffic flows to be able to view the actual charts used for the various operations as they are described to you. Therefore, at the end of my statement, I will utilize these charts to describe the traffic patterns in the Los Angeles area.

Naturally, the FAA is concerned with ensuring that aircraft operations in the Los Angeles area are conducted safely, despite the congestion caused by the sheer volume of traffic. Many of our efforts appear to be paying dividends. In 1980, 5 midair collisions involving 10 aircraft were reported, and through July in 1981, there has been 1 collision involving 2 aircraft. In 1980, there were 21 reports of near midair collisions; for 1981 there have been 16 such reports. It should be noted Mr. Chairman that reports of near midair collisions by pilots can cover a wide range of occurrences. There are three basic types:

- (1) Critical - a situation where collision avoidance was due to chance rather than pilot action. Less than 100 feet of aircraft separation would be considered critical.
- (2) Potential - an incident which probably would have resulted in a collision if no action had been taken by either pilot. Closest proximity of less than 500 feet would be a rough approximation of a potential near-midair.
- (3) No hazard - When direction and altitude would have made a midair collision improbable regardless of evasive action taken.

Only about 20% of those near midair collisions reported were of a critical nature.

In 1980 there were 24 system errors reported in the Los Angeles basin; in 1981 there have been 11. Again, a reported system error can encompass many things. The definition of a system error is an occurrence which results in less than the applicable separation minima between two or more aircraft, or between an aircraft and the terrain or other obstacles and obstructions. Our separation standards have safety margins built into them; thus, the violation of a separation standard does not necessarily constitute a safety hazard. For instance where a five mile separation of aircraft is required, if actual separation of aircraft were reduced to 4.5 miles this would be considered a system error, although there would really not be any threat to safety.

Let me describe some of the measures we have taken to improve the safety record in the Los Angeles basin. In conjunction with user input, we have developed a VFR Flyway Chart which identifies to G.A. pilots general routes and blocks of altitudes in which they can fly to avoid heavy flow areas of high performance aircraft. More than 50,000 of these charts have been distributed to pilots.

User input was also utilized in modifying the geographic boundaries of the Burbank Terminal Radar Service Area (TRSA) to better serve the flying public. A TRSA is airspace surrounding designated airports wherein air traffic control provides radar vectoring, sequencing and separation on a fulltime basis for all IFR and participating VFR aircraft. The changes to the Burbank TRSA eliminated areas in which VFR pilots were choosing not to utilize these services and added areas where pilots had requested such services. Thus, the purpose of the TRSA will be better carried out with the new boundaries. The Long Beach and Santa Ana areas are being considered for TRSAs by the end of 1983.

We have modified the Los Angeles Airport VFR corridor procedures, and pilots have been briefed on how to use a self-announce frequency for ingress/egress information. This procedure comes into effect in designated locations where a pilot tunes in a prescribed frequency and announces over the air that he is entering or leaving the area. The information is transmitted to other pilots in the area and is designed to increase pilot awareness of nearby planes.

We have just completed the implementation of actions necessary to ensure proper ingress/egress information for pilots using uncontrolled airports, including the advertising of proper

frequencies and facilities that provide radar service, and appropriate traffic pattern information. In order to increase general aviation pilot awareness, a graphic chart depicting turbo-jet arrival/departure routes for Los Angeles International was published in the Class II NOTAMS on August 20, and it will be carried in the Airport/Facility Directory thereafter. This will promote safety by enabling G.A. pilots to avoid these areas, and thus decrease the mix of turbo-jets and propeller driven aircraft.

Finally, the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) has developed two task force teams made up of interested user groups plus local air traffic representatives and local government officials to review procedures in the Van Nuys and Ontario areas. We will carefully study any recommendations they make, and implement those which are consistent with our mission to promote the safety and efficiency of the system.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to echo the remarks made by Mr. Fenello regarding the rebuilding of the air traffic control system. Here in the Los Angeles basin we are working as hard as possible to manage our current resources so that we can provide as much service as possible to system users, without compromising system safety. Safety has not been compromised in this region, nor will it be as we rebuild the system.

At this point, Mr. Chairman, I would like to utilize the various charts I've brought with me to describe to you the air traffic flows in the Los Angeles basin.

(graphic display follows)