

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE FEDERICO PENA  
SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION  
before the  
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON AVIATION  
concerning DENVER INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT  
May 11, 1995**

**MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE:**

**I WOULD SUGGEST THAT THE TITLE FOR THIS HEARING  
SHOULD HAVE BEEN: "HOW TO BUILD AN AIRPORT IN THE 21st  
CENTURY - THE LESSONS LEARNED FROM DIA."**

**WITH ME TODAY IS CYNTHIA RICH, ASSOCIATE ADMINISTRATOR  
FOR AIRPORTS AT THE FAA, WHO WILL OFFER THE FAA'S  
PERSPECTIVE ON THE DENVER PROJECT.**

**AS THE MAYOR WHO HAD THE VISION, LAID THE GROUNDWORK,  
AND GENERATED THE POLITICAL AND COMMUNITY  
CONSENSUS TO BUILD THIS AIRPORT, AND AS THE SECRETARY  
WHO OPENED THE AIRPORT, LET ME STATE AT THE OUTSET  
THAT DENVER INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT IS A REMARKABLE  
SUCCESS STORY. DIA IS THE FIRST MAJOR AIRPORT BUILT IN  
THIS COUNTRY IN TWENTY YEARS. NOTWITHSTANDING MEDIA  
OR OTHER COMMENTARY, AND NOTWITHSTANDING THE  
DELAYS IN OPENING DIA, THE ACTUAL TIME TAKEN IN  
PLANNING, DESIGNING, AND BUILDING DIA COMPARED TO  
OTHER AIRPORTS BUILT FROM SCRATCH WAS REMARKABLY  
SHORT. THE PROJECT CONTRIBUTES SUBSTANTIALLY TO**

**INCREASING THE NATIONAL AIR TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM, FAR SURPASSING THE GAINS FROM OTHER PROJECTS THAT WENT FORWARD DURING THIS SAME PERIOD.**

**AS SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION, I CAN TELL YOU THAT BOLD EXPANSION OF AVIATION SYSTEM CAPACITY IS VITAL TO OUR NATIONAL ECONOMY AND GLOBAL COMPETITION. HAVING PERSONALLY GONE THROUGH THE EXPERIENCE IN DENVER AS MAYOR, AND NOW HAVING SERVED AS SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION, I AM CONCERNED THAT A MAJOR NEW AIRPORT MAY NOT BE BUILT OR THAT EXISTING AIRPORTS CAN SIMPLY ADD AIRFIELD CAPACITY UNLESS WE UNDERSTAND THE SUCCESSFUL MODEL THAT BROUGHT DIA TO FRUITION. CLEARLY, THERE ARE IMPORTANT LESSONS TO BE LEARNED, AND MISTAKES WERE MADE. WE SHOULD SHARE THIS EXPERIENCE WITH OTHER COMMUNITIES WANTING TO EXPAND THEIR FACILITIES, AND I HOPE THAT WILL BE THE OUTCOME OF TODAY'S HEARING. OTHER COMMUNITIES CAN FOLLOW THE DENVER EXAMPLE AND SUCCEED IN EXPANDING AIRPORT CAPACITY, BY CONSTRUCTING EITHER NEW AIRPORTS OR MAJOR NEW RUNWAYS.**

**I WILL FIRST DISCUSS MY EXPERIENCES AS THE MAYOR OF DENVER WHO SUCCESSFULLY SPEARHEADED THE PLANNING OF A NEW AIRPORT. SECOND, I WILL ADDRESS THE ISSUES OF DIA AS SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION, TO STATE FROM THE**

FEDERAL PERSPECTIVE WHAT WENT RIGHT WITH THE BUILDING OF DIA. LAST, I WILL DISCUSS WHAT WE MUST LEARN FROM DIA, SO THAT IF ANOTHER MAJOR NEW AIRPORT IS EVER BUILT IN THIS COUNTRY, IT CAN PROFIT FROM THE EXPERIENCES THE CITY OF DENVER, THE STATE OF COLORADO, THE AIRLINE TENANTS, AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT ALL SHARED IN JOINING TOGETHER TO GET THIS AIRPORT BUILT.

#### I. MAYOR

AS MAYOR, THE CASE FOR REPLACING THE 65 YEAR OLD STAPLETON AIRPORT WAS CLEAR. BECAUSE THE MAJOR RUNWAYS WERE TOO CLOSE TOGETHER FOR SIMULTANEOUS OPERATIONS IN BAD WEATHER, SUBSTANTIAL DELAYS WERE CREATED THAT EMANATED THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. FOR MANY YEARS, TRAVELERS DELAYED IN LOS ANGELES, CHICAGO, ATLANTA, OR DALLAS-FT. WORTH WERE REGULARLY TOLD: "DENVER'S THE PROBLEM. . . IT'S ALL BACKED UP." SUBSTANTIAL EXPANSION OF THE AIRPORT WAS OUT OF THE QUESTION BECAUSE OF ADDED NOISE IMPACTS ON 35,000 PEOPLE IN DENVER AND ADAMS COUNTY AND NOISE LAWSUITS ALREADY PENDING AGAINST THE CITY.

STAPLETON WAS EXPERIENCING SO MANY DELAYS THAT NATIONAL ADS TOLD TRAVELERS TO AVOID STAPLETON. IN CONTRAST, THE NEW DENVER AIRPORT NOW HAS THE

**DISTINCTION OF BEING THE ONLY AIRPORT TO COME OFF THE  
FAA's "TOP 20" LIST OF CONSISTENTLY CONGESTED  
FACILITIES.**

**IN MY VIEW, IF THERE IS A SINGLE, SIGNIFICANT "LESSON  
LEARNED" FROM THE DENVER PROJECT, IT IS THAT THE  
GROUNDWORK HAS TO BE LAID EARLY AND  
COMPREHENSIVELY WITH THE COMMUNITY AND ITS LEADERS  
TO ASSURE SUCCESS. THE BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY  
FOR LOCAL GROWTH AND THE OVERALL RATIONALE HAVE TO  
BE PUBLICIZED IN AN ONGOING EDUCATION PROCESS. THIS  
AIRPORT WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN BUILT WITHOUT A MASSIVE  
PUBLIC EDUCATION CAMPAIGN. ONE MUST BE WILLING TO  
TAKE THE LEAD ON THE COMPLEX POLITICAL AND  
JURISDICTIONAL ISSUES WHICH WILL SURFACE AND TRY TO  
FIND "COMMON GROUND" THAT MOST CAN ACCEPT.**

**IN THE CASE OF DENVER, TWO ELECTIONS ON BUILDING THE  
NEW AIRPORT WERE SEPARATELY CONDUCTED IN BOTH OF THE  
COUNTIES INVOLVED -- WITH THE DENVER REFERENDUM  
UNDERTAKEN EVEN THOUGH NOT REQUIRED. THE OUTCOME IN  
BOTH CASES WAS A STRONG ENDORSEMENT OF THE PROJECT.**

**FORTUNATELY, IN DENVER WE SUCCEEDED. WHILE MUCH IS  
MADE OF THE COST ESCALATION LATE IN THE PROJECT FOR**

**TENANT-REQUESTED CHANGES AND THE COMPLICATIONS OF THE AUTOMATED BAGGAGE-HANDLING SYSTEM, THE PROJECT**

**AS FIRST LAID OUT TO THE COMMUNITY CAME IN ESSENTIALLY ON-BUDGET AND ON-TIME. THE COST INCREASES LATE IN PROJECT WERE NOT OVER-RUNS OF THE ORIGINAL PROJECTIONS. THEY WERE THE PRICE OF REQUESTED CHANGES IN DESIGNS. BECAUSE THE PROJECT HAD TOP NOTCH PRIVATE SECTOR MANAGERS, MATTERS THAT TYPICALLY GET SNARLED IN LITIGATION -- SUCH AS THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT -- WENT SMOOTHLY.**

**A WORD ABOUT THE FAMOUS BAGGAGE-HANDLING SYSTEM. THE DECISION TO MODIFY THE ORIGINAL DESIGN AND CREATE A SINGLE FULLY AUTOMATED SYSTEM THROUGHOUT THE AIRPORT WAS MADE LATE IN THE PROCESS, AND AT THE REQUEST OF A MAJOR TENANT. THIS CHOICE WAS THE SINGLE MOST SIGNIFICANT FACTOR THAT DELAYED THE AIRPORT OPENING 16 MONTHS, AND LED TO A SUBSTANTIAL COST INCREASE IN CAPITALIZED INTEREST. THE IMPORTANT POINT IS THAT THIS DECISION WAS A DEPARTURE FROM THE ORIGINALLY AGREED-TO DESIGN AND COST LEVELS. THE TESTING AND SOFTWARE CHALLENGES WERE UNDERESTIMATED, BUT THIS SHOULD NOT TAKE AWAY FROM THE FUNDAMENTAL ACHIEVEMENT OF BRINGING DIA ON-LINE TO REPLACE STAPLETON.**

## **II. SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION**

**AS SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION, I CAN TELL YOU THAT IT IS IN OUR NATION'S BEST INTEREST TO CONTINUE TO EXPAND AIRPORT CAPACITY THROUGH BOLD INITIATIVES SUCH AS DIA. AND I DO NOT NEED TO REMIND THIS COMMITTEE OF THE SUSTAINED AND MANY BI-PARTISAN EFFORTS THAT LAID THE GROUNDWORK FOR DENVER INTERNATIONAL.**

**THE FAA PLAYED AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN ACHIEVING THIS IMPORTANT GAIN IN SYSTEM-WIDE CAPACITY. THE FAA, WITH THE FULL SUPPORT OF SECRETARY SKINNER, CHOSE THE DENVER PROJECT AS ONE OF THE MOST PROMISING FOR INCREASING OVERALL SYSTEM CAPACITY. IN MAY 1990, A LETTER OF INTENT WAS SIGNED BY FORMER SECRETARY SKINNER WHICH WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN ASSURING THE SUCCESS OF THE DENVER PROJECT.**

**THE FAA'S OVERSIGHT OF THE PROJECT WAS COMPREHENSIVE, REFLECTING THE COMPLEXITY OF BUILDING A MAJOR NEW AIRPORT (INCLUDING THE FAA'S OWN AIR NAVIGATION FACILITIES), AND THE \$456 MILLION COMMITTED IN FEDERAL AIP FUNDING. IN FACT, THE FAA ASSIGNED TWO TEAMS TO**

**OVERSEE THE PROJECT, ONE ON-SITE AND ONE AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL. WHEN THE AIRPORT'S OPENING WAS**

**DELAYED LAST YEAR, CYNTHIA RICH TOOK A PERSONAL ROLE IN INCREASED VIGILANCE.**

**MY TWO IMMEDIATE PREDECESSORS, SECRETARY SKINNER AND SECRETARY ANDREW CARD, BOTH ENDORSED THE FAA'S PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS FOR DENVER, AND CARRIED THROUGH ON THE FEDERAL COMMITMENT. THEIR VISION FOR REAL GROWTH OF THE SYSTEM HAS PROVEN SOUND, AS THE RECENT OPENING OF DENVER INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT CLEARLY DEMONSTRATES. THIS FACILITY IS MEETING OR EXCEEDING ITS PERFORMANCE BENCHMARKS, ESPECIALLY DURING THE TYPE OF ADVERSE WEATHER CONDITIONS THAT PLAGUED OLD STAPLETON. AND WITH STATE -OF-ART TECHNOLOGY AND RUNWAY DESIGN, IT IS ONE OF THE SAFEST AIRPORTS IN THE WORLD.**

**AS THE COUNTRY'S SIXTH BUSIEST AIRPORT, DENVER IS WELL ON ITS WAY TO REDUCING DELAYS NATIONWIDE, AS THE FAA PROJECTED. I AM PLEASED TO REPORT THAT, AFTER JUST TWO MONTHS OF ACTUAL OPERATIONS, THE AIRPORT IS DELIVERING ON ITS PROMISE TO DRASTICALLY REDUCE BAD-WEATHER DELAYS. THE LATEST DATA ON 62 DAYS OF OPERATION SHOW 3.9 DELAYS PER-THOUSAND OPERATIONS, COMPARED WITH**

**34.5 DELAYS PER-THOUSAND FOR STAPLETON DURING THE EQUIVALENT PERIOD. THESE NUMBERS -- NEARLY A 90% REDUCTION IN DELAYS -- DEMONSTRATE THAT THE INITIAL RATIONALE AND PLANNING THAT UNDERLAY THE NEW AIRPORT WERE SOUND.**

**FINALLY, THIS PROJECT COMPARES FAVORABLY IN OVERALL COST WITH OTHER CURRENT AIRPORT PROJECTS, HERE AND ABROAD. INTERNATIONALLY, CONSIDER THE KANSAI AIRPORT PROJECT IN JAPAN, WHICH HAS JUST ONE HIGH-CAPACITY INSTRUMENT RUNWAY AND COULD COST AS MUCH AS \$14 BILLION DOLLARS. THE NEW AIRPORT IN HONG KONG IS PROJECTED TO COST OVER \$9 BILLION.**

### **III. LESSONS**

**THERE IS MUCH THAT CAN BE LEARNED FROM DIA. FIRST, THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSON IS THAT WELL DEVELOPED COMMUNITY SUPPORT MUST PRECEDE A DEVELOPMENT PROJECT OF THIS MAGNITUDE. THE COMMITMENT MUST BE TO DEVELOP A VISIONARY YET ECONOMICALLY WELL GROUNDED PROJECT PREDICATED ON BROAD LOCAL SUPPORT, AND THEN TO HAVE THE PERSEVERANCE TO STAND FIRM IN THE CONVICTION OF THE PROJECT'S IMPORTANCE.**

**SECOND, ATTRACT EXPERIENCED PRIVATE SECTOR ENGINEERING AND DESIGN FIRMS AND MAKE THEM AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE AIRPORT TEAM.**

**THIRD, DON'T MAKE MAJOR DESIGN CHANGES LATE IN THE PROCESS UNLESS IT IS ABSOLUTELY CLEAR THE CHANGES WON'T DELAY THE COMPLETION DATE.**

**FOURTH, THE INTRODUCTION OF HIGHLY SOPHISTICATED SYSTEMS THAT RELY ON NEWLY WRITTEN SOFTWARE CAN ONLY OCCUR IF SUFFICIENT TESTING AND RE-DESIGN TIME CAN BE ACCOMMODATED TO GUARANTEE IMPLEMENTATION ON-TIME.**

**FIFTH, ONE MUST ADDRESS THE PREDICTABLE TENSION THAT ARISES BETWEEN THE AIRLINES AND THE AIRPORT OPERATOR ON THE QUESTION OF EXPANDED CAPACITY. THERE ARE MANY CONSIDERATIONS HERE, AND THESE CONFLICTS WILL NOT RESOLVE THEMSELVES IN MANY CASES. WE KNOW THAT IN 1993, 23 AIRPORTS IN THE U.S. EXPERIENCED MORE THAN 20,000 HOURS OF FLIGHT DELAYS; THAT NUMBER IS PROJECTED TO GROW TO 32 AIRPORTS BY THE YEAR 2003 UNLESS CAPACITY IMPROVEMENTS ARE MADE. ACTION IS NECESSARY AND THE FAA AND DOT ARE SEEKING TO PUT THESE LESSONS TO WORK AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL. WE ARE ALSO TRYING TO MAKE LIMITED FEDERAL RESOURCES GO FURTHER THROUGH INNOVATIVE FUNDING TECHNIQUES. BY**

**COMBINING THESE EFFORTS AND THE LESSONS OF AIRPORT  
PROJECTS, LIKE DIA, WE CAN CONTINUE TO EXPAND AIRPORT  
CAPACITY THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES.**