

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Subcommittee on Aviation

Hearing: FAA Reauthorization Act of 2009

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Statement of Roger Cohen, President
Regional Airline Association

Mr. Chairman and members, I am Roger Cohen, President of the Regional Airline Association (RAA). RAA represents the interests of more than 30 regional airlines and nearly 300 of their suppliers in the US. Thank you for the opportunity to offer the regional industry's perspective on this immensely critical issue.

The events of the past several years have only further cemented America's regional airlines as a fundamental cornerstone of our air transportation industry and a critical part of the nation's economy:

- Carry some 160 million passengers annually – more than one out of every five passengers in scheduled service.
- Fly 40% of the nation's passenger fleet and nearly 50% of the scheduled flights
- Most notably, regional airlines serve more than 600 airports across the U.S., and in 476 of those communities – some 75% -- regional airlines provide the *only* scheduled service.

As you know, it was a much different aviation landscape when we had the honor of testifying before this committee in Spring, 2007, but the principles we outlined on behalf RAA's Board of Directors then, have become even more critical today:

1. Most importantly, do no harm. Preserve the network of air service to small and medium-sized communities. Most passengers are normally just one stop away from any point in the U.S., and even around the globe.
2. Transition quickly but efficiently to a modernized, satellite-based national airspace system.
3. Funding for the system should reflect a more balanced "splitting of the check" amongst the users of the system.
4. Restore the balance of the 1990 ANCA law under which airport fees would be spent primarily on expanding and improving the nation's airways and airport infrastructure.
5. Fulfill the promise made to by Congress under the 1978 Deregulation Act that Essential Air Service communities would not fall off the airline map without adequate protections.

Your bill, in great measure, addresses these principles and it's why the regional airlines helped to advance the measure that reached the Senate floor in the previous Congress.

However, now we are in a different place. Last year's speculative driven run-up in fuel costs and the tanking of the world economy have created a much tougher challenge. Consider that between December 2006 and December 2007, regional airlines added a net gain of 77 *new* nonstop markets. However, last year, regional airlines were forced to cut back and there was a net loss of 243 non-stop markets – compared to a net loss of 101 mainline routes. In

other words, last year communities served by regionals suffered flight cutbacks at more than twice the rate of larger mainline-served airports.

Even more troubling, some 31 airports lost *all* their scheduled service last year – including airports serving three state capitols – potentially worsening the burden of an already overstressed and under funded Essential Air Service Program.

But like those infomercial business gurus and high school football coaches preach, sometime problems are just opportunities in disguise – and the hopefully temporary cutbacks in flights have perhaps provided some breathing room, a time out from the hysterical headlines about flight delays, to make the real progress towards NextGen that Congress, the FAA and so many people in this room have been working towards for decades. Another unintended but beneficial consequence of the current crisis: it's helped bring all of aviation closer together, focusing us on the operational, economic, and environmental benefits of ATC modernization.

Our member regional airlines have much riding – and much already invested – in this effort. Through the hub and spoke networks that have provided the benefits of safe, seamless service to passengers from small and medium-sized communities, regional airlines have become the backbone at many of nation's busiest airports, for example, operating more than half the scheduled flights at ORD, PHL, IAD, HOU, DET, MSP, and more than a third at DEN, JFK, LGA and BOS. Regional airlines flying everything from 90 seat RJs flown by SkyWest, Pinnacle, Comair, Atlantic Southeast and others, to advanced 70 seat turboprops operated by Colgan and Horizon Air, to Cape Air's nine seat flights connecting Logan and Kennedy to small communities across New England.

This is why regional airlines have committed substantial resources to be leaders in the transition to NextGen. Four RAA member regional airlines are pioneers in installing Electronic Flight Bags (EFBs) on their aircraft as participants in the Capstone 3 program, adding an additional layer of safety to prevent runway incursions for Skywest at LAX; Shuttle America and Piedmont at PHL and the NY airports; CommutAir in CLE. Horizon Air was the second airline in the country approved for RNP approaches. Through data communications, WAAS, RNP, RNAV, ADS-B, EFB – the whole alphabet of modernization – regional airlines have become essential parts of NextGen. By the way, a note of caution about the transition: many of the smaller airports served exclusively by regionals, could be the first airports to lose their ground-based landing systems, making it potentially even more difficult to for commercial airlines to access these communities unless they are NextGen equipped.

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion, while the number of both flights and delays are down – the first number far more than to our liking and the second number less than we'd prefer -- the need for action is even greater than it was two years ago. Towards this end, RAA and our member airlines look forward to working with you, all of Congress, the Administration and FAA to make it happen.

Thank you and I'd be pleased to answer any questions.