



U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Washington, DC 20515

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April 5, 2005

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Federal Aviation Administration
1500 K Street, NW - Suite 500
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Mr. Chew and Mr. Keegan:

We are writing regarding the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) Joint Planning and Development Office (JPDO) and the Administration's proposed cuts to the Agency's Facilities and Equipment (F&E) budget. More specifically, while we are generally supportive of the JPDO's mission and planned work, we are concerned that reduced spending on new air traffic management technologies may undercut efforts to transform the National Airspace System and meet the anticipated demand for air travel.

Two years ago, the FAA requested and received from Congress a \$3 billion a year authorization for its F&E program. Just last year Secretary Mineta pledged that, "We will harness technology in a way that triples the capacity of our aviation system over the next 15 to 20 years." Yet, the Administration is proposing to cut the F&E program—the primary vehicle for modernizing the National Airspace System—well below its authorized level for a second straight year to \$2.448 billion for FY2006. Also, the FAA's capital investment plan (CIP) would freeze investments in new technology at roughly \$2.4 billion for the next 5 years.

While the FAA appears to have protected many of its major programs designed to modernize and refresh its current capabilities, the FAA will be spending much less on technological enhancements to the system. Compared to what FAA would have done under with \$3 billion annual F&E budget, the agency will now have 53 percent less funding for FYs 2005-2009 for technological enhancements.

Last December, the JPDO released its *Next Generation Air Transportation System (NGATS) Integrated Plan* (the "NGATS plan"). The NGATS plan spells out in broad and general terms a possible direction for achieving a more agile air traffic system. For example, the NGATS plan discusses the importance of data link communications, the possibility of transitioning to a system

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with less dependence on ground infrastructure and facilities, and the need to establish user-specific situational awareness.

However, over the last two years a number of technology efforts that showed promise and enjoyed some industry support and that seem to fit with concepts outlined in the NGATS plan (i.e. satellite-based programs, data link programs and programs designed to enhance user-specific situational awareness etc.) have experienced cancellations, deferrals, extensions, or may simply not be started under the most recent CIP.

We understand that the JPDO is beginning to explore what can be done well before the 2025 timeframe. This is a needed step. Given these facts, we would appreciate it if you answer the following questions:

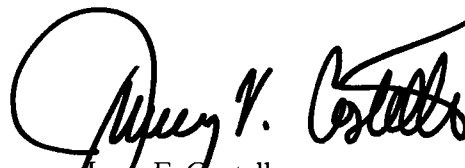
- 1) What are the specific key enabling technologies/programs necessary for FAA to achieve the goals of the NGATS?
- 2) Does the FY2006 CIP reflect the needs of the NGATS goals?
- 3) If a \$2.4 billion F&E program is extended outward indefinitely, will FAA be able to achieve the goals of the NGATS?
- 4) It has been suggested that the FAA will require a "bow wave" of capital to transform the air transportation system. Is this true, and if so, what will it cost to achieve the goals of the NGATS and when would a capital infusion be required?

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to hearing from you in this regard.

With all best wishes.

Sincerely,


James L. Oberstar
Banking Democratic Member


Jerry F. Costello
Banking Democrat
Subcommittee on Aviation