



U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
Washington, DC 20515

Don Young
Chairman

James L. Oberstar
Ranking Democratic Member

May 31, 2006

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The Honorable Marion C. Blakey
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue, SW Room 1010
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Administrator Blakey:

We are writing regarding House Aviation Subcommittee Chairman John L. Mica's letter dated March 29, 2006 on the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) Screener Partnership Program (SPP). More specifically, we are writing to strongly oppose the Chairman's suggestion that Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Airport Improvement Program (AIP) discretionary grants be awarded on a priority basis to airports that choose to participate in the SPP. We do not believe that an airport's decision to participate in the SPP provides any enhanced security benefit, and, in any event, participation in the program should not be used as a basis for awarding AIP monies.

It is our strongly held position that, in awarding AIP discretionary funds, the FAA must continue to use its standardized priority system, outlined in the AIP Handbook (Order 5100.38C), to ensure that the limited discretionary funds are given to projects that provide the greatest benefits in enhancing "safety, security, reconstruction, standards and capacity. . ." and ensuring the integrity of the national airspace system (NAS). An airport's decision to use private screeners provides none of those benefits.

Chairman Mica's letter cites recent Government Accountability Office (GAO) covert testing audits as evidence that private screeners (now employed at six airports) are outperforming their federal counterparts. We disagree.

GAO has reported that in covert tests of passenger screening from September 2002 through September 2004 failure rates of private screeners overall were somewhat lower than those for federal screeners--a difference GAO determined to be statistically significant. However, GAO has advised us that the results of more recent covert testing (October 2004 through August 2005) do not show a statistically significant difference between private and federal screeners.

Additionally, GAO has informed us that while covert test results provide an indicator of screening performance, they cannot solely be used as a comprehensive measure of any airport's screening performance, or in determining the overall performance of federal versus private screening. Rather, these data should be considered in the larger context of additional performance data, such as the Threat Image Projection system, recertification, and local covert testing, when measuring screener performance.

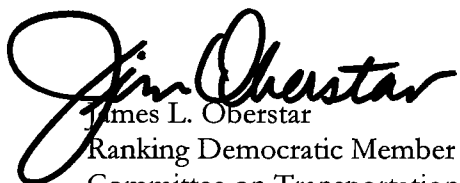
Further, last year the Inspector General's office of the Department of Homeland Security conducted its covert testing at airports (including testing at two private screener airports), and did not report any noteworthy differences between federal and private passenger screeners.

Although Chairman Mica singled out the passenger screening testing results of private screener airports as "impressive," they are actually far from impressive. What the GAO and DHS IG reports demonstrate is that both sets of screeners, private and federal, need to improve performance.

At the same time, FAA forecasts that airlines are expected to carry more than 1 billion passengers by 2015, increasing from approximately 740 million in 2005. FAA's *Capacity Needs in the National Airspace System* study stated that *even with* improvements specified in FAA's *Operational Improvement Plan (OEP)*, 15 airports would need additional capacity by 2013. Yet despite this anticipated increase in traffic, the Administration has proposed cutting the AIP program almost \$1 billion below its authorized level for FY 2007. Discretionary AIP will be cut almost \$118 million below its authorized level.

With a need for new capacity set against shrinking AIP dollars, FAA's discretionary funds must be used responsibly and judiciously. It is imperative that the FAA remains focused on its long-range goals for and short-term fixes to the NAS, and not be sidetracked by suggestions to change its formula for awarding discretionary grants on the basis of a program that does not provide any enhanced security benefits.

Sincerely,


James L. Oberstar
Ranking Democratic Member
Committee on Transportation
and Infrastructure


Jerry F. Costello
Ranking Democratic Member
Subcommittee on Aviation