



**Testimony of Greg Principato
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before the

**House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
Subcommittee on Aviation
*“Aviation and Airport Holiday Travel”***

November 15, 2007

Chairman Costello, Ranking Member Petri, members and staff of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Aviation, thank you for allowing Airports Council International-North America (ACI-NA) the opportunity to participate in this important hearing on aviation and airport holiday travel. My name is Greg Principato and I serve as President of ACI-NA. Our 360 member airports enplane more than 95 percent of the domestic and virtually all of the international airline passenger and cargo traffic in North America. Nearly 400 aviation related businesses are also members of ACI-NA.

As Members of the Subcommittee know, demand for air travel continues to grow and travel experts are predicting the 2007 holiday season to be one of the busiest ever. Airports are especially cognizant of the increase of passenger traffic during the holiday period, including leisure travelers who may not be familiar with security screening protocols and airline requirements. Airports have systems in place to address issues that may arise with increased airport congestion, long passenger waiting lines and delayed flights.

Airport Preparations for the 2007 Holiday Travel Season

Each year airports put into place a number of customer service initiatives to ensure that passengers have a positive and smooth travel experience during the holiday season. Some of the areas that airports are emphasizing this year in their preparations include:

- ***Airport Information***: Airports will work with their local media to provide important information for passengers before they leave for the airport. In the past this outreach has

resulted in public service announcements on local radio stations and television reports about the need to check the status of their flight before leaving home, the availability of parking, as well as if delays are expected due to weather, security issues or air traffic problems.

- ***Airport Websites:*** Airports will also be advising passengers to check airport websites for timely information available 24 hours a day. In addition, airports will advise passenger to visit www.fly.faa.gov where they can receive timely information regarding flight delays.

- ***Liquids, Aerosols and Gels (3-1-1):*** Airports will remind travelers to decide before leaving home whether to pack their liquids, aerosols and gels in checked bags or put them in three ounce or smaller containers, all of which fit into a one-quart resealable bag and pack them in their carry-on baggage.

- ***Complimentary Bags:*** Many airports will have staff and/or volunteers helping to inform travelers of TSA's 3-1-1 rules before they reach the passenger security checkpoints. Airports may also provide complimentary, resealable one-quart bags at tickets counters, kiosks, and security checkpoints to help passengers contain their three or less ounce containers of liquids, aerosols and gels.

- ***Parking:*** Airports will work to ensure that all parking booths will be open. Some may have more shuttle buses and extra staff to assist passengers with automobile problems such as dead batteries or locking themselves out of their cars.

- ***Law Enforcement:*** Many airports will deploy additional law enforcement officers to monitor and control traffic flow at the curbside and for necessary enforcement of federal local and state regulations and laws.

- ***Infrastructure Maintenance:*** Airports will have supplemental staff to quickly respond to problems in basic services such as heating and lavatories.
- ***Airport Concessions:*** Many airport concessionaries, especially food outlets, will increase staff on the heaviest of travel days.
- ***Snow Removal:*** As always, in colder climates where snow is predicted or already falling, airports will have on hand snow removal equipment and implement irregular operations plans.

Airports, Airlines, TSA and CBP All Have Important Roles

Ensuring secure and expeditious travel for passengers, as well as providing a high level of customer service, is a shared responsibility between airports, airlines, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), and Customs and Border Protection (CBP). However, airports understand the important role we play in addressing passenger needs during ground delays or severe weather. We have contingency plans in place to work with airlines in assisting passengers when weather or other factors cause irregular operations leading to extended ground delays. But we also recognize that those plans can be enhanced and we are working in cooperation with our member airports, airlines and federal authorities to make the current system better.

In September, more than 40 industry representatives from thirteen airports and six major airlines gathered at Dallas/Forth Worth International Airport (DFW) to facilitate better planning to collectively respond to significant service disruptions affecting passengers. The session at DFW provided a forum for airport and airline staff to identify passenger

needs and proactive strategies to minimize passenger discomfort during irregular operations.

Participants heard case studies of successes and failures and developed a mechanism to start sharing best practices across the industry to serve passengers' needs during significantly disruptive events. One airport discussed its detailed plans for deplaning passengers using airside portable stairways it had purchased to utilize during a disruptive event. Accommodating unaccompanied minors, providing sleeping mats, diapers, infant formula, pharmaceutical, medical assistance and developing unified passenger communication plans were also covered. The single most important conclusion, however, was the need for airports and airlines to employ the same techniques that have long been successfully used to plan for emergencies, snow storms and construction disruptions.

ACI-NA will also convene a January 17-18 meeting in Washington, DC with representatives from the airports, airlines, FAA, TSA and CBP to further identify needs and resources necessary to assure high quality passenger service during major disruptive events.

It is important to note that many factors outside the airport's control will greatly influence passengers' travel through the airport; most notably airline and TSA staffing. While there may be recognition that the number of travelers will increase during the holiday period, the fact that many of these passengers are not familiar with the check-in or security procedures must be considered. This can often lead to increased congestion and

confusion around airline kiosks, delays at the ticket counter, as well as in baggage and passenger screening. To quickly process the expected high volume of traveling passenger during the holiday season, it is critical that appropriate airline and TSA staffing be in place. Many airports have already met with both their airline tenants and the TSA Federal Security Director to discuss these important issues.

Potential delays from inadequate CBP staffing could also present problems for airports and passengers. Although international flight arrival patterns can vary considerably by time of year and day of week, the holiday season represents a busy time for passengers arriving from or traveling to foreign destinations. In cooperation with CBP officials, airports are working to ensure adequate CBP staffing levels to ensure efficient and timely processing for arriving international passengers.

Long Term Solutions

ACI-NA appreciates the leadership of the Subcommittee and full Committee in recognizing that expanding physical airport capacity should be the first priority when responding to airport congestion. While airports are being pro-active and working diligently this holiday season to ensure a positive experience for the traveling public, we believe that H.R. 2881, the “Federal Aviation Administration Reauthorization Act of 2007,” serves as the long-term solution that will provide airports the financial tools necessary to build critical safety, security and capacity projects, including new runways, taxiways and terminals to meet growing airline passenger needs. By increasing the ceiling on the Passenger Facility Charge user fee to \$7.00, as found in H.R. 2881, airports

can meet the growing passenger demand by planning *now* to invest in modern, secure and comfortable and environmentally compliant facilities for air travel. We appreciate your hard-work in passing H.R. 2881, and are committed to working with you to complete FAA Reauthorization this year.

Summary

In closing, ACI-NA and its member airports thank you for the opportunity to provide this information. We look forward to working with you on this important issue for the aviation industry.