

February 1, 2016

The Honorable Bill Shuster
Chairman
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
2251 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Shuster,

As former federal government officials and policymakers, we are writing to urge bipartisan support for transformational change of our nation's air traffic control system. While the U.S. air traffic control system is the world's largest and safest, we need bold action now to address the fact that our air traffic infrastructure and technology are falling behind.

Attempts to reform our air traffic control system have been made under both Democratic and Republican Administrations. In fact, during the Clinton Administration it was proposed as part of reinventing government. This is not about politics, it is about policy.

There was a time when the United States was the gold standard in every aspect of air traffic control. Those days of global leadership, regrettably, are gone. The U.S. no longer has the most modern equipment, the most efficient airplane routings or the best technology of any of the world's air traffic control providers. Further, the accumulated effects of budget unpredictability and a bureaucratic organizational structure have slowed progress on implementing next-generation technologies and inhibited our ability to properly staff facilities and procure the best equipment for our nation's air traffic controllers.

The FAA's largest and most essential facilities are more than 50 years old and much of the technology housed within them dates back almost that far. All of this means that travelers suffer longer flight times, more numerous departure delays and higher cancellation rates—and have access to fewer airports. All stakeholders including commercial, business and general aviation operators, passengers and labor have been negatively impacted by the stops and starts of the federal budget process. Our nation's air traffic control system should not be treated like a political football and subjected to the vagaries of the annual budgeting process. In addition, the ATC service provider should be regulated at arms-length by the FAA, just as air carriers, aircraft and engine manufacturers, and all other components of the aviation system are regulated by the FAA.

- MORE -

We need a reliable, robust 21st century system that ensures access for all users—preserving and expanding services for all communities, large and small. We urge Congress to take action to preserve the FAA’s safety oversight of air traffic control while moving the operation and funding of air traffic control to a federally chartered, non-profit organization that would be governed and funded by the stakeholders and users of our nation’s aviation system. Only by taking this step will the United States be able to regain its global leadership and preserve the safety and efficiency that our citizens have enjoyed for so many years.

Sincerely,

The Honorable Byron L. Dorgan*
U.S. Senator for North Dakota, 1992-2010

The Honorable Trent Lott*
U.S. Senator for Mississippi, 1989-2007

The Honorable James H. Burnley, IV*
Secretary of Transportation, 1987-1989

The Honorable Norman Y. Mineta
Secretary of Transportation, 2001-2006

The Honorable Mary Peters
Secretary of Transportation, 2006-2009

The Honorable J. Randolph Babbitt*
FAA Administrator, 2009-2011

Russell G. Chew
FAA Chief Operating Officer, 2003-2007

David Grizzle
FAA Chief Operating Officer, 2011-2013

Henry P. “Hank” Krakowski
FAA Chief Operating Officer, 2007-2011

Dorothy Robyn
White House National Economic Council
Special Assistant, 1993-2001

** Messrs. Burnley, Dorgan, Lott and Babbitt currently serve as advisers to the airline industry.*