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ORIGINAL

LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT 30

MESA, GILBERT, SUN LAKES
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Arizona House of Representatives
Phoenix, Arizona 85007

August 16, 1999

U.S. Department of Transportation Dockets
Docket Nos. FAA-9959262 and FAA-99-5927 -10
400 Seventh Street SW, Room Plaza 401
Washington DC 20590

RE: Grand Canyon Air Tours

Dear Sirs:

The purpose of this letter is to express my concerns about the proposed rules limiting commercial air tours over the Grand Canyon. These rules unnecessarily restrict our air tour industry, which in turn harms Arizona Tourism. They impose further restrictions in the face of substantial evidence that noise is not a significant concern to the vast majority of our visitors to the Grand Canyon. Finally, they fail to address the most viable solution to the issue of aircraft noise, which is quiet technology incentives.

Tourism is a vital component of the Arizona Economy. Many visitors choose to visit Arizona because of their familiarity with and interest in seeing the Grand Canyon, one of the Seven Wonders of the World. It is the state's premier tourist destination, attracting foreign and domestic visitors by the millions as well as our own residents.

I believe your proposal to restrict air tour operations to 1997-1998 levels is unnecessary and detrimental to our efforts to encourage visitation to Arizona. It creates an unhealthy economic environment for our air tour operators, who are key partners in our efforts to promote Arizona worldwide. Destruction of this important industry will adversely impact our promotional efforts and directly result in reduced visitation to our state as visitors forego a visit due to time limitations.

Restricting operations to 1997-1998 levels is unwarranted. Visitor complaints about noise are at insignificantly low levels because the vast majority of park visitors (over 95%) are concentrated in areas that are off-limits to air tours. The FAA and Park Service are entirely off base in attempting to erase noise for the benefit of the remaining 5%. In fact, according to your own numbers, 3% of this 5% are river rafters who could not possibly hear aircraft noise over the sound of the river. To "restore natural quiet" for the benefit of 1.6% of park visitors, at the cost of limiting access by air, is grossly unfair and unreasonable in light of the fact that air tour passengers represent over six to eight times the number of backcountry users.

NOTE: Using the FAA's own numbers:

Backcountry users (1.6%) totaled 99,137.
River rafters (3.0%) totaled **182,481**.
All others (95.4%) totaled **5,788,187**.
Air tours passengers have ranged between
616,000 (1997) and 821,000 (1995).

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
DOCKET SECTION

As a public official, I am constantly faced with the challenge of balancing the demands of various interest groups. Under no circumstance would any decision I make be based on such overwhelming disproportionate interests.

While it is important to preserve and protect the Grand Canyon from potential destruction, it is equally important to provide access to it. The National Park Service is responsible for preserving our parks and regulating their use to ensure enjoyment by future generations. FAA regulations governing park airspace must be consistent with this charge. Air tours do not harm the Grand Canyon or hinder its enjoyment by future generations. FAA regulations governing the park airspace must be consistent with this charge. Air tours do not harm the Grand Canyon or hinder its enjoyment by future generations in any way. The "environmental impact" caused by aircraft sound is fleeting. It has no long-term consequences. On the other hand, backcountry users impact the park in many ways that effect its preservation for future generations. Including destruction of natural vegetation, soil erosion, removal of artifacts and damage to historic ruins.

Finally, I would like to address the issue of quiet technology incentives. If the FAA and Park Service are truly concerned about providing a naturally quiet environment and solitude for the 1.6% of backcountry users, they should provide incentives for air tour operators to invest in quiet technology aircraft. Instead, they have continued to focus their efforts on noise mitigation strategies, which creates uncertainty for the air tour industry.

While the provisional incentive corridor is a positive proposal, when taken in conjunction with air tour limitations and continued delays in proposing quiet technology standards, it does not serve as an incentive to operators. In addition to threatening the viability of the industry, the limitations discourage operators from investing in new aircraft. Without a sense of certainty about the future of the industry, and without the ability to fully use new aircraft in order to recover costs, no wise businessperson will risk making such an investment.

The Grand Canyon is a state treasure. I believe, as public officials, it is our duty to protect it and preserve it for future generations. I do not believe your current efforts further this obligation and urge you to withdraw these rules and start anew.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeff Groscost". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "J" and a long horizontal stroke.

Jeff Groscost
Speaker of the House