

Docket Managerial System
U.S. Department of Transportation, Room Plaza 401
400 Seventh Street, SW., Washington, DC 20590-0001
Docket Number FAA-2002-14081

I am writing concerning the proposal that would require commercial airplanes to have the capability to immediately activate the designated air traffic control hijack alert code. Once activated, the transponder would provide the continuous transmission of the code to air traffic control during a hijack situation. The proposal is in response to the heightened threat of United States civil aviation and the Federal Aviation Administration believes that this capability would provide air traffic control personnel extra time to initiate a response to a potential hijacking.

Looking back on September 11, 2001 there is an approximate estimation of time before the planes hit the World Trade Center and Pentagon. In most cases, there was some time from the instant they were overtaken until the minute they crashed. If this transponder technology were installed in the aircrafts, air traffic control personnel would have been alerted sooner and the authorities could have possibly evacuated the buildings. There would have been more time to initiate a plan.

Since the events of September 11th never happened before, there was no response plan for something so tragic and catastrophic. There was no way of knowing if fighter jets could scramble fast enough, or if the order to shoot down civilian aircraft would have been given. However, if the transponder technology were in place, appropriate people could be notified and action could have been taken. This transponder technology needs to be implemented in all commercial aircraft because there is little idea when another hijacking could happen again. If this attack does happen again, will we know what this person will do, but most importantly, will we have the time to react?

Finally, I think there should be two amendments to the transponder alert code. Since the proposed rule affects only commercial aircraft, which need a transponder with Mode C, there should be no way to turn off the transponder. This way, every aircraft transmits a reading. Another idea is that a device should be installed to automatically transmit the hijack alert code if someone tries turning off the transponder. The alert code should transmit if it is tampered with as well. The hijackers on September 11th turned off the transponders so they would “disappear” on radar. I think we should develop a way to safeguard the transponder so if someone tries to turn it off, the hijack alert code will appear immediately. We need to make sure that our national airspace is protected.

Nicholas Zych