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REMARKS FOR
THE HONORABLE NORMAN Y. MINETA
SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION

**CHICAGO O'HARE
FLIGHT DELAY REDUCTION MEETING**

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Good morning, everyone. Thank you, Marion, for that kind introduction and for your leadership at the FAA.

Thank you all for being here. We have before us an urgent and unusual and important piece of business. It is an agenda focused on a single result: that is, to relieve the delays at Chicago O'Hare Airport that are choking travel across the heartland of America and causing massive back-ups that ripple throughout our aviation system.

This is not a meeting that any of us really wanted to have; in fact, it is one that we worked aggressively to prevent. But the conclusion is inescapable: Chicago O'Hare's on-time performance is unacceptable. Even with peak-hour schedule reductions by the two largest airlines serving that airport – and I want to acknowledge the positive past responses that they gave us – even with those reductions, delays have reached historic levels this summer.

So I have been forced to call this meeting under the authority given to me under vision 100 to try to eliminate the O'Hare bottleneck and to keep passengers moving. We hope that the results of the meeting will produce a temporary solution as we move toward a long-term response to better align capacity with demand.

As Marion has indicated, our economy is roaring back and Americans are flying again in record numbers. And that is good news.

But the serious congestion at Chicago O'Hare looms overhead like a dark cloud, casting a threatening shadow on the recovery. We cannot – and we will not – allow this critical hub to become a choking point that stalls the economy and drives passengers away.

The gridlocked situation at O'Hare is not good for anyone. It is not good for frustrated families who are stranded in airports. It is not good for businesses. And it is not good for passengers made miserable as a result of sitting for hours on hot runways.

Each minute that they wait takes thirty dollars or more from your bottom line. And it is adding up fast. So far this year, we have had nearly 58,600 delays – more delays in just six months than the full-year totals in 2000, 2001, and 2002.

So let us begin this morning by recognizing that we are going to do something about this problem, right here and right now.

Our Growth without Gridlock meeting earlier this year was a good precursor for what we have to do – and it showed that this industry can work toward a common goal. That same spirit needs to carry forward to today's meeting.

And let me be very clear. You all must be part of the solution. Just like that old adage: if you are not part of the solution, then you are part of the problem – and it applies here to air carriers.

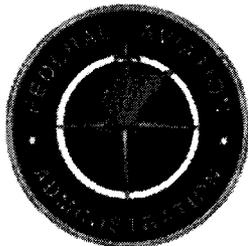
Our goal is not to dictate. We are asking every airline to look at its own schedule and come up with alternatives that better match the airport's capacity.

But the bottom line is this: we are going to get schedules in line with the present capacity at O'Hare so that travelers no longer face intolerable log-jams.

On behalf of President Bush, let me thank all of you again for being part of this effort. We are counting on you to produce results for your customers and for all of the traveling public. I want to thank you all for attending, and I look forward to the outcome of this meeting.

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Briefing Room



Speeches

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Remarks Prepared for Delivery
Marion C. Blakey
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
O'Hare Delay Reduction Meeting with Airlines
Washington, DC
August 4, 2004

Good morning. Thank you for all for coming. I think we can start this meeting on a very positive note. To begin with, look around. The major players are at the table - - voluntarily. That's a major step in pulling together and crafting a solution to delays at O'Hare.

The second piece of good news is that aviation is back. Air traffic is back. And so's the economy. You know, the resurgence of aviation hasn't caught any of us by surprise. We've been saying for some time that traffic would return to pre-9/11 levels . . . that it'd even be exceeded in some markets. As recently as March at the FAA's forecast conference, we predicted this resurgence.

And now we're living with the challenges that this resurgence has brought. People are flying again, and judging from the schedules, a great deal of them have bought tickets stamped "Chicago." But the on-time performance at O'Hare is unacceptably low, and as Chicago goes, so goes the system. Delays in Chicago trigger delays across the country.

The fact of the matter is that we can't let scheduling at O'Hare hold the entire system hostage. No one wants a repeat of the summer of 2000. The airlines need to step up to the plate. You can't control the weather, but you can control your schedule. And that needs to start happening right away. When all is said and done, each of us wants the same thing: a smooth and efficient system. That's why we're here. This is a problem that we share, and it's a problem we'll fix. Together.

We're fortunate to have with us this morning an outspoken advocate of aviation, a man accustomed to helping groups find the answer to difficult questions. The Secretary of Transportation. He's been involved with the issue of reducing delays and making the system run more smoothly from the very start. When it comes to getting the job done and getting it done right, this man stands out. Please welcome the Secretary of Transportation, the Honorable Norman Mineta.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary. Let me echo the Secretary's comments. We know what the problem is, and we're here today to solve it. We've worked together collaboratively in the past to great success. Let's continue that momentum.

As the Secretary mentioned in March, Growth without Gridlock was a first-of-its-kind meeting for all of us. We said, "Here's what's coming. What are we going to do?" And together, we worked out some plans and procedures that we wouldn't have been able to use before.

Collaboration over air traffic management has been highly effective in the last several months. Anyone who's been to the Command Center at seven in the morning can attest to the daily meetings we have to plan around weather, schedules and airspace issues. That's a whole new era in air traffic control. And we also have better predictive tools-more accurate and timely. And we're using them.

As many of you have seen, the FAA is also taking pains to reach out to the passenger. We're using Fly FAA Wireless and internet travel services to get travelers the info they need, when they need it at their fingertips.

And then there are new runways. Four last year alone. That's quite a boost to capacity. As you're also aware, the City of Chicago has proposed a modernization plan for O'Hare. The environmental impact statement for this effort - - one of the most complex and controversial undertakings in recent years - - is scheduled to be completed in the Fall of 2005. The FAA is taking every step to expedite the process, which is on a very aggressive schedule.

So, it's clear that we're working hard at collaboration and other avenues. But despite these initiatives, we still face the problem of congestion at O'Hare. The increase in scheduled flights in November was simply too much for the airport to handle. As everyone in this room well knows, the drop-off in performance from

October to November 2003 was stark and unmistakable.

The on-time performance percentage prior to November 2003 ranged from the mid-70s to the mid-80s. In November, it plummeted to an on-time arrival rate of 60 percent. Earlier this year, the Secretary and I determined that we would exercise our authority to convene a meeting like this one, but before it was to occur, we secured 5 percent voluntary cuts from American and United beginning in March. We secured an additional 2-1/2 percent voluntary cuts for June. These cuts were then incorporated into orders issued by the FAA. I want to thank both carriers for their cooperation. A big part of the reason we're here today, however, is that our orders and the existing limitations on these two carriers expire October 31st.

We know the existing reductions have lessened delays somewhat. In fact, without them, delays would have been significantly worse. But we also know that flights added during peak periods by other carriers offset a portion of the reductions by American and United. Everyone's got to pitch in. It's that simple.

Our experience and actual airport performance during peak periods from November through May suggest that an effective target for arrivals per hour is 86 with no more than 22 arrivals in any 15-minute period. Obviously, these are target levels, and we welcome a discussion during the individual carrier sessions about whether we have set these levels appropriately. In choosing these levels, we've reviewed the proposed schedules of various carriers at O'Hare in addition to those of American and United and see very limited need for, or room, for growth. Of course, to make sure that the public doesn't lose the benefits to competition that can come from additional flights by new entrants or other carriers, any solution that we craft must leave some room for them. But let me emphasize that in our judgment such room is quite limited.

To illustrate this issue, we've put together some slides that summarize congestion and delay at O'Hare. As many of you know, there are two databases that are used to depict delays. These slides will use data from ASPM - - Aviation System Performance Metrics - - which is more relevant to our discussion because it measures delay from the passengers' perspective.

And as you'll see from these slides, the numbers are clear. The first slide (#1) shows that on-time arrivals at O'Hare are lower than they have been in four years. So far this year, only 67 percent of arriving flights at O'Hare are on time. To put that in context, our system-wide on-time arrival goal is 82 percent, and, if it weren't for O'Hare, we'd be meeting it.

On the graph below, you can see that on-time gate departures are lower than they have been in four years.

We're judged largely on our ability to get passengers to their destinations on time. This next slide (#2) paints a picture that's hard to ignore. In the previous 10 months, nearly one-third of all arrivals at ORD were delayed. As you can see below, 37 percent of those delays lasted for more than an hour. We think the traveling public tolerates a waiting period of 15 minutes or less. But the public's patience has a tipping point when it comes to extended delays.

Let's take a moment to look Chicago along side the top 35 airports in the country (#3). O'Hare is the red column, and the other airports are in yellow. In every month since last November, the percentage of delayed operations has been greater at O'Hare than at the average percentage of delays at the top 35. Take a closer look at the months before American and United made peak-hour reductions to their schedules. The number of delays at O'Hare were significantly greater than those experienced by the top 35. January is an eye-ful.

You know, it's not just passengers in Chicago who are affected when O'Hare is overscheduled. This airport creates a ripple through the rest of the system. Based on our modeling of over-scheduling at ORD, it can be shown that a significant amount of system-wide schedule delays can be traced back to O'Hare.

This is the last slide (#4). Looking forward, unless we do something, it's not going to get better by itself. This compares scheduled arrivals for this month with the November 2004 Official Airline Guide schedule for O'Hare. November is when the current voluntary agreements with American and United expire. Many of these hours are scheduled at or above the August OAG levels. That's not going to work. We cannot allow over-scheduling to increase delays and gridlock the system.

As we have said more than once, the Secretary and I have the statutory authority and obligation to ensure the efficient use of the navigable airspace, and we will have to take action unilaterally if we can't come to an agreement here. But the new authority granted to us by the Congress in our reauthorization to bring together the air carriers using O'Hare gives the opportunity for a more flexible solution that tries to take account of everyone's needs.

Let's be clear. We all know the long-term solution is more capacity at O'Hare -- more pavement. But that's

not tomorrow. And in the meantime, we want to balance the needs of the market with the need to move the system safely and efficiently.

As I said, if we're unable to achieve the level of flight reductions we believe necessary to relieve congestion and delay, we're prepared to invoke our authority under the Federal Aviation Act. If we need to, we'll issue an order requiring the most efficient schedule that reflects our best judgment . . . which might not be yours. But given the track record for collaboration we've established recently, I think we all agree that's a place we don't have to go. We want you to have a voice. We're here to meet an immediate need at O'Hare. I'm hopeful we can do it.

Questions About This Page