According to the Jan. 15 Federal Register, the Department of Transportation seeks to create a massive database which is exempt from the provisions of the Privacy Act of 1974.

This system, which would store information on every air traveler, is ill-defined. The definitions of the information to be collected are broad enough to allow almost any personal data to be tracked. Operating such a system without the protections of the Privacy Act removes all public oversight. The public has no way of knowing what data is collected by them or verifying its accuracy.

It is doubtful whether such a system would improve public safety. This system, as proposed, will contain information on a vast number of innocent travelers. It is unclear whether such a vast collection could be promptly and effectively searched to find criminal activity. No matter what search criteria are used, the chance for false positives is high.

It is also doubtful whether the Department of Transportation can secure such a database. The potential of abuse is obvious, should such a database be compromised. Depending on the data collected--which, again, could include almost anything--any compromise of this database could release financial information, credit card numbers, travel itineraries and destinations and confidential details from law enforcement investigations. Nothing in this proposal indicates that adequate safeguards will be in place for this data. The potential for compromise of such a database is quite real, as evidenced by the recent problems with Tricare.

When I look over this proposal, I see an ill-conceived system which would introduce several new privacy risks for the American air traveler. I see the increased expense of a vast program to collect, store and secure data. I see a process attempting to hide from public scrutiny and from the protections afforded us under the 1974 Privacy Act.

I do not see any tangible benefits, and I do not see anything that would outweigh the above concerns.