

**Statement of Steve Brown
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National Business Aviation Association

**Airline Delays
And Consumer Issues**

U.S. House of Representatives

Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Subcommittee on Aviation

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Chairman Costello, Ranking Member Petri and members of the Subcommittee, good afternoon. It is a privilege to be with you today.

My name is Steve Brown. I serve as Senior Vice President for Operations at the National Business Aviation Association. Our association represents businesses across the country that use general aviation aircraft to make their business model work. The vast majority of these companies are small to mid-size businesses using a single airplane.

One element of my responsibilities at NBAA is management of the General Aviation Desk at the Air Traffic Control Command Center for the Federal Aviation Administration in Herndon, Virginia. This is the facility that coordinates all of the Instrument Flight Rules, or "IFR" flights in the United States.

Prior to joining NBAA, I served as the Associate Administrator for Air Traffic Services at the FAA, where I managed the operation of the nation's ATC system.

Earlier in my career I was employed as a commercial pilot and taught aviation courses on the faculty at Texas A&M University.

This varied background has provided me with many of the insights I will outline today about how the nation's aviation system functions.

Mr. Chairman, as you and the other members of this Subcommittee know, for the past several months, the general aviation community – specifically, business aviation – has endured numerous erroneous allegations from the nation's big airlines. They have attempted to blame record delays and increasing congestion on our community.

I can tell you from my years of experience and current flying activity that such assertions are untrue, especially when you look at the facts.

For instance, at the nation's 10-busiest airports, general aviation accounts for less than four percent of all aircraft operations. When it comes to the busy New York area, which receives so much attention today, our operations have actually gone *down* in recent years.

For the first six months of 2007, FAA statistics show that general aviation accounted for only about two percent of all operations at La Guardia, Newark, and JFK airports – *combined*.

These numbers are so low because our members typically avoid the big airline hubs and instead fly primarily into areas where there are no capacity constraints.

On the rare occasions when our operators *do* go into the airline hubs, we frequently do so using different approaches and runways, as is the case with Boston's Logan Airport. What that means is that, even in the small number of cases when we're in areas with a lot of airline congestion, we're not contributing to it.

Clearly a fair question is, if general aviation isn't causing delays what is? Let me again reference New York's airspace. Based on my years managing the airspace, I can tell you that when there are capacity issues in the air, it's usually because of the problems being caused by airline hub operations on the ground at congested airports.

For example, JFK has enough capacity normally for 44 departures between 8 and 9 a.m., but the airlines regularly schedule 57 departures. When they do that, the gates become full. The scheduled carriers then fill the taxiways and runways with what we in the industry call "conga lines." There's nowhere to put additional airplanes on the ground, so the arriving aircraft obviously start backing up in the air, waiting for landing clearance.

It's natural then, that when it comes to delays, Department of Transportation data show that the commercial airlines' scheduling practices are the second-leading cause of delays, exceeded only by adverse weather.

It is also worth noting that a few successful airlines are using schedules that create smooth demand on the air traffic control system and avoiding the destructive practice of over-scheduling and causing “peaks” that stimulate delays.

Former FAA Administrator Marion Blakey recently told an industry gathering that airline schedules are “out of line with reality,” and that “if the carriers aren't ready to address the situation, they shouldn't be surprised if the government steps in.” During my years with Administrator Blakey at FAA, we initiated the airline scheduling discussions that ultimately resulted in significant delay reductions at Chicago's O'Hare Airport.

The president of the National Air Traffic Controllers Association has also said repeatedly that: “Severe weather accounts for over 70 percent of delays, which are exacerbated by the hub-and-spoke operation. The rest is either airline staffing woes, air traffic controller staffing shortages or the airlines' own operations.”

Clearly, general aviation is not the problem when it comes to airline delays, and no authoritative source has ever concluded otherwise. However, we are committed to expanding system capacity because when capacity becomes constrained, general aviation is usually the first segment to be pushed out.

For example, our industry has embraced technologies that help increase the capacity of the aviation system. Just over two years ago, our operators equipped their aircraft – at their own significant cost – with cockpit technology allowing for “Reduced Vertical Separation Minimums,” or “RVSM.” That long-winded term basically describes technology that doubles the number of high altitude routes available in the airspace system. The majority of these new routes created by the capacity increases are used by the airlines every day and are saving them millions of dollars in fuel and flight time.

Our industry also leads the way in supporting stakeholder efforts to lay the groundwork for a modernized aviation system. NBAA has representatives on every stakeholder committee addressing this issue, and I personally co-chair with my ATA airline counterpart the Aviation Regulatory Committee that is focused on a promising technology called Automatic Dependant Surveillance Broadcast, or "ADS-B." This technology is widely viewed as the cornerstone for aviation system modernization.

While the business aviation community embraces new technologies and stakeholder initiatives focused on expanding system capacity, we also support legislation aimed at system modernization.

Mr. Chairman, this subcommittee has demonstrated a commitment to strengthening the nation's aviation system by approving an effective legislative proposal to modernize the system.

In addition, the "FAA Reauthorization Act of 2007" uses a proven funding mechanism, fuel taxes, to raise needed funds for system transformation without resorting to foreign-style user fees or providing tax breaks for other industry segments as the critical need for modernization and more capacity arises. The legislation substantially increases the fuel taxes general aviation will pay to support system modernization.

Mr. Chairman, the business aviation community clearly has a record of supporting technologies, initiatives and legislation for modernizing the aviation system.

But I want to make sure the members of this committee don't lose sight of one central point. And that is, airline delays are basically a self-inflicted wound that is a by-product of their business practices at major hub airports.

My many years of managing, teaching and flying in the aviation system have made this reality clear. Data in monthly reports on delays from the federal government tells us that this is the case. And, people with a real understanding of how the system works and how airlines operate know this is the case.

Anyone who tries to convince the public or members of Congress and this subcommittee that the situation is otherwise is simply not representing the complete picture, or the essential facts.

Thank you, and I look forward to any questions you may have.

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