



October 8, 2020

The Honorable Steve Dickson
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Administrator Dickson:

We write today to express our serious concerns over the recent announcement that the Front Range Airport—now known as Colorado Air and Space Port (CASP)—has come to an agreement with New Frontier Aerospace (NFA) to have NFA test hypersonic drone rockets at the spaceport and within six miles of one of the nation’s busiest commercial airports. Our organizations believe that the testing of experimental, hypersonic unmanned aircraft will create unnecessary safety hazards and airspace conflicts in proximity to a commercial airport that is critical to the safety and efficiency of the National Airspace System (NAS).

By way of background, at the time of the launch site license application, FAA and the owner of CASP—the Adams County Board of County Commissioners—made clear that launches from the spaceport would be confined to a vehicle type capable of takeoffs and landings with characteristics similar to conventional aviation in order to minimize airspace and safety impacts. In its formal response to the Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA), FAA indicated that “operational parameters”—confining spaceport operations to ensure the safe and efficient use of the NAS—would be codified in an agreement between CASP’s owner and the Denver International Airport. Unfortunately, it is our understanding that to date, no formal agreement codifying these parameters has been reached. It is also important to note that CASP is where a significant number of general aviation operations occur.

We find the latest announcement from CASP regarding testing hypersonic drones alarming in its ramifications for safety and airspace impacts on tens of millions of travelers who travel through Denver International each year and on local general aviation operations. These local airspace impacts will undoubtedly affect the entire NAS. In addition, the characteristics of the aircraft are outside the scope of any representations made on the application for a spaceport or any representations made during the PEA.

We do not believe that the testing of experimental drone rockets is appropriate within such proximity to Denver International Airport, one of the nation’s busiest airports and airspace, or consistent with FAA’s approval of the license application. At a minimum, we specifically request that FAA require an environmental assessment of the safety, airspace, and community impacts associated with testing an experimental rocket at CASP. We would also request that the

operational parameters created during the launch site license application process be codified to avoid confusion in the future.

Thank you for your consideration.

Air Line Pilots Association, International
Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association
Airlines for America
American Association of Airport Executives
National Business Aviation Association