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REMARKS BY
THE HONORABLE NORMAN Y. MINETA
SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION

CHICAGO O'HARE NEWS CONFERENCE
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3PM

Good afternoon. Thank you for joining us.

As many of you know, delays at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport have increased sharply in recent months reaching, what I believe to be, an unacceptable level.

These delays are clogging our national airspace system and significantly inconveniencing the traveling public.

Congestion across the aviation system is a problem we were addressing before the horrifying events of September 11th. But after 9/11, demand decreased, and our efforts focused on increasing the security of air travel.

Well, the good news is that the passengers are coming back, and security is vastly improved.

The bad news comes in the form of congestion, and it has hit hardest at Chicago O'Hare. In the month of December alone, delays at O'Hare caused more than a 10 percent increase in the average flight delay at the Nation's top 35 airports.

While this Department continues working toward a comprehensive, long-term solution to this challenge, we must provide American travelers with necessary and immediate action to alleviate potential travel delays.

This is important because we want to keep people moving. And, we want the economy to continue to grow. Delays cost time and money. In fact, the economy loses billions of dollars to delays each year. Obviously, that is unacceptable.

So today, we are signing an order to help alleviate the growing problem of delays facing Chicago's O'Hare International Airport.

Effective immediately, American and United airlines have agreed to cut their peak-hour operations by 5 percent. This action will remove a total of 62 aircraft during peak travel times – between the hours of 1 p.m. and 8 p.m. – considerably reducing delays.

This reduction closely returns scheduled O'Hare operations to October 2003 levels – the last month prior to the onset of severe delays.

This announcement is the result of a lot of hard work on the part of the FAA and the airlines to maximize throughput and minimize delays during peak hours.

We have worked independently with American and United to consider schedule reductions, and to find ways to better disperse scheduled flights. And we have studied the impact of the operations of these airlines on the entire aviation system.

It is because of these efforts, that I am confident that today's announcement is the right first step toward getting planes in to, and out of, Chicago on time.

And I applaud the willingness of the airlines to cooperate in solving this issue of great national importance.

However, if we do not achieve a sufficient delay reduction through these voluntary actions, the FAA's reauthorization bill, "Vision 100," that was passed last December by Congress, makes other measures available for achieving results.

I hope that this will not be necessary as the Department and the airlines work toward immediate and mutual, long-term solutions, some of which Administrator Blakey will outline in a moment.

Again, my thanks to Marion Blakey and the FAA for all of their work on this issue. Marion, thanks for all you've done to make this moment possible. And now, now for signing the order.

Thank you again for your attendance today. I must leave for another meeting, but Marion will continue to be available for additional comments and to take your questions.

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