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April 5, 2005

Federal Aviation Administration
Great Lakes Region Headquarters
2300 E. Devon Avenue
Des Plaines IL 60018

C. L. Hunziker, Regional Administrator

Due to a 2-month bout with the flu, the following statements and opinions - modifying my original comments regarding the proposed O'Hare airport expansion previously submitted in 2004 – were delayed. However I believe you will find the enclosed material of interest. Since I'm now semi-retired, any enhancement of the said material would be possible in person if it is so desirable. 1

Sincerely yours,

Richard Blomberg

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NOTE: The following (4 pages) was submitted in written form (originally) and mailed on April 6th

2005 Great Lakes Region Airport Upgrades

The total number of runways proposed in Chicago's O'Hare International Airport plan is both excessive and unnecessary now and in the foreseeable future. While the number of aircraft operations is increasing, the increasing percent of smaller aircraft - which create less turbulence - require less time between takeoffs. This results in increased aircraft takeoff operations for a given runway. As an example, T-tail B818 (i.e. MD design series) aircraft can takeoff at a rate of 2 to 3 per 2-minute interval while B747-400 aircraft takeoff at a rate of 1 per 2-minute interval.

However this increasing range of aircraft sizes create both potential and actual operational problems in air traffic control. A relatively small regional jet released too soon behind a B747-400 can encounter control problems due to air turbulence. And the same regional jet should follow 2 to 2,5 minutes (not 30 seconds) behind a B747-400 (for the same reason) in the landing pattern. Due to shorter average takeoff intervals, the existing O'Hare runways might be adequate for takeoff operations depending on the aircraft mix. However for aircraft safety and airport performance, two (2) additional east-west runways are needed for aircraft size separation. The relatively short proposed east-west runway at the north end of O'Hare would serve regional jets and like sized smaller aircraft. In contrast, the longest O'Hare runway (i.e. northwest L32-14) would primarily be used for the largest aircraft including the B747-400 and the even larger A380. This would maximize aircraft safety and airport performance while decreasing air traffic controller operational stress and potential operational errors provided the present TRACON equipment is upgraded. At this time there is no proven need for any additional runways south of the present passenger terminal area that could create undesirable operational problems. 2

The following prudent steps need to be taken to safely improve the Chicago area (i.e. Great Lakes Region) aircraft operations:

1. The marginally operating TRACON equipment needs to be replaced prior to the implementation of any airport runway upgrades. With increasing aircraft densities, even a short shut down of aircraft movement control in this region could be disastrous particularly during bad weather. [Refer to attached TRACON equipment article.] 3
2. The number of O'Hare aircraft gates needs to be increased at the undeveloped east end of the present passenger terminal complex (previously vacated by an air cargo company). And a new large aircraft passenger terminal needs to be constructed separate from and west of the current terminal complex. (The current terminals cannot process 535 intercontinental passengers exiting together from a single aircraft like the A380. And the increasing range of aircraft size presents safety problems in aircraft ground movement; the 262-foot wingspan of the A380 is 50 feet greater than the B747-400.) 4
3. The 2 new parallel O'Hare east-west runways north of east-west runway R27-9 and the present passenger terminal complex should be the extent of the O'Hare airport runway upgrade. (These 2 runways are cost effective and will significantly increase both airport safety and operational performance. Additional

excessive costly runway expansion would result in the same problems presently facing the St. Louis area.)

4. A southern runway should be built, but at Chicago's Midway Airport. (Parallel to the present single northwest runway – with the same east and west boundaries – it would provide the same operational latitude being sought for the O'Hare airport.)

-rcb

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NATCA's take on FAA staffing report: A "Wal-Mart solution in a Tiffany box"

Recent report criticizes agency for slowing down STARS timetable

The Department of Transportation inspector general's office recently released a report spotlighting the Federal Aviation Administration's troubled record on terminal modernization and implementing Standard Terminal Automation Replacement System (STARS).

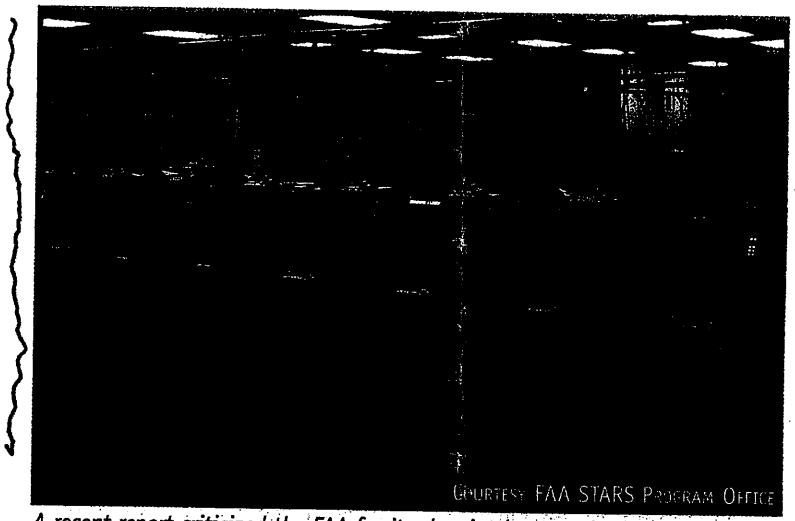
"Faced with additional cost growth in the STARS program, FAA is rethinking its terminal modernization approach - a long overdue step that should have been taken several years ago," the report stated. And a number of large TRACONS - Chicago, Denver, Minneapolis and St. Louis - are still functioning on 1970s-era displays.

While the FAA initially planned to completely upgrade to STARS by this year, it has extended its timeframe to 2008 at key facilities where the need for updated software is most urgent.

At Denver TRACON, the outmoded displays lock up sometimes as often as once a week; Chicago controllers also experience similar problems. Ray Gibbons, the facility representative at Chicago TRACON, remarked in the *Chicago Tribune* "the antiquated system we are working with today is pushed to the limit every day. The radar scopes frequently lock up, and the locations of aircraft do not update on the screen. Sooner or later, the dam is going to burst."

Doug Fralick, NATCA's director of safety and technology, agreed with the report and noted that its findings echo the union's position on the FAA's slow implementation of STARS. "We agree with the findings of the report. These facilities simply cannot afford to wait until 2008 for updated displays," he remarked.

NATCA President John Carr and Fralick met with the inspector general's office several months before the report came out and voiced NATCA's concerns about the agency's timetable for deploying STARS.


Courtesy FAA STARS Program Office

A recent report criticized the FAA for its slow implementation of Standard Terminal Automation Replacement System (STARS) at various facilities.

According to the report, the FAA's budget estimate was $2.1 billion in 2004, which was over $300 million more than the previous year. The report noted: "FAA is now operating in a constrained budget environment and has very little ability to absorb further cost growth in any of its acquisition programs."

Yet, the need for upgrade at some of the nation's largest terminal facilities will remain dire for the foreseeable future.