

Statement of

**The Honorable Bill Campbell
Mayor of Atlanta**

on

Pending Aviation Issues

before the

**House Transportation and Infrastructure
Subcommittee on Aviation**

U.S. House of Representatives

February 29, 2000

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and Members of this Subcommittee, I am Bill Campbell, Mayor of Atlanta. I thank you for this opportunity to talk with you today on pending aviation issues.

I am testifying today on behalf of the City of Atlanta and The United States Conference of Mayors, where I chair the Conference's Transportation and Communications Committee.

Mr. Chairman, I am also pleased to join with my colleague, Susan Savage, the Mayor of Tulsa, to share our views on the need for Congressional action on a comprehensive aviation renewal bill. Mayor Savage and I are here today to make our urgent call to end the deadlock in the House-Senate Conference Committee and pass this legislation.

I appreciated the opportunity to work with you on the passage of TEA-21 which, as you well know, provided great growth opportunities in surface transportation. I am here to tell you that we Mayors strongly support you and this Committee's efforts to secure a final aviation agreement as is set forth in "AIR-21."

Overview

Today I also come before you as the Mayor overseeing the busiest airport in the world, Hartsfield International Airport. In this capacity, I would like to underscore the importance of the aviation legislation now pending before this Congress. And, I would suggest that getting an agreement this year on the legislation is among the most important questions for the 106th Congress.

It is now an undeniable fact that the future health and overall competitiveness of the U.S. economy, and the city/county metro

economies that drive it, are directly tied to the strength and performance of the nation's aviation infrastructure.

Our experience in the Atlanta region offers compelling evidence of the need for this nation to take stock of the role of aviation in helping to build world class economies for the 21st century.

Hartsfield International Airport

Let me talk more specifically about Atlanta's Hartsfield and the Atlanta region. Last year, I am proud to say that Hartsfield became the busiest airport in the world, providing services to more than 78 million passengers. Today, more than one of every ten passengers in the United States passes through Hartsfield.

This did not happen by accident. It was because of the vision of local leaders in our region who understood early on that aviation investment is a powerful ingredient in building strong local economies. I am convinced that AIR-21 is a contemporary example of this same kind of vision. Passage of AIR-21 is critical to the future of aviation infrastructure in the United States and certainly, for us, in Atlanta.

The performance of this critical transportation asset – Hartsfield – has been for some time, and will continue for the foreseeable future, to fuel the economy of the greater Atlanta metro region, our state and the U.S. economy. We have calculated that Hartsfield has a \$15 billion annual economic impact on the Atlanta region. Our airport now anchors a regional economy that in 1998 outpaced U.S. economic growth by more than two to one. And, the benefits of this output, including the performance of our airport, extend well beyond the boundaries of our region. Simply put, the region's growth depends on Hartsfield and Hartsfield's growth depends on passage of AIR-21.

And, mayor after mayor can offer their own testimonials about the role of aviation investment in securing the future of their cities and their regions.

AIR-21 and Hartsfield

Naturally, we do not take our success for granted. We are continuing to invest in the facilities and improvements that are needed to keep our airport performing, as are all of the other mayors.

We Mayors are increasingly concerned about continuing delays, and not just those at our airport, but here on Capitol Hill. In Atlanta, our entitlement funds under the AIP program and payments under our LOI (Letter of Intent) for our new runway are being held hostage by the stalled negotiations over AIR-21. As I just discussed, our airport has a \$15 billion economic impact on the Atlanta region, and to secure this for the future, Hartsfield and for that matter all airports that are so vital to their communities' economic vitality, must have the federal partnership resources provided by AIR-21.

Hartsfield's capital improvement needs now total about \$8 billion over the next 15 years. The resources and authorities provided under AIR-21 are crucial to our airport and so many others that continue to experience shortfalls in funding needs, as demands on our aviation infrastructure continue to escalate.

Mr. Chairman, we thank you and the Members of this Subcommittee for your leadership, and we so much appreciate the very able and committed leadership of Chairman Shuster and Ranking Minority Member Oberstar, and for the vision you have

set forth in AIR-21. This legislation provides the framework to help us close this shortfall in capital needs and respond to the rising demands of the travelling public and the businesses that are so dependent upon the performance of our aviation system.

Support of Mayors for AIR-21

Let me now speak to the features of AIR-21 that will insure our ability to finance our needs at Hartsfield and for other airport needs throughout the nation's aviation system.

AIR-21 would –

- ensure that funds collected are expended on aviation needs, and provide certainty over time on what funds will be available;
- triple annual “entitlement” grants under the Airport Improvement Program (AIP) that flow to the ‘primary’ airports;
- increase the availability of AIP discretionary funds to support significant investments at many airports;
- allow airports to increase Passenger Facility Charges (PFC);
- double AIP entitlement grants for cargo airports;
- increase funding commitments to noise mitigation; and
- make changes to the AIP program to ensure funding for smaller airports and strengthen the national system.

These provisions explain why the nation's mayors so strongly support your efforts on this legislation. I was pleased to author a strong policy resolution last year at the Conference of Mayors' 1999 Annual Business Meeting which conveyed the mayors' strong support for AIR-21. I should also point out that this statement included our support for a continuing “fair share” allocation of general fund revenues in support of AIR-21 and investments at FAA and at our airports.

Let me make a few additional points about the legislation. Like the debate on TEA-21, we are strongly committed to the principle that aviation trust fund revenues be expended for the purposes for which these revenues were collected. This is a must. At a time when the federal government's fiscal house is in order, this is the time to make good on the pledge to the travelling public and others. And, we need to recognize the relatively modest share of the federal revenue commitment we are talking about in putting trust back into the aviation trust fund. This would ensure sizable economic benefits if used only for aviation needs.

Mayors are also familiar with the continuing debate over the PFC. These are not taxes, these are fees from the users of these assets. Local governments could not function under the standard some are suggesting in describing these fees as taxes. How could cities operate the many user-based systems and other enterprise functions for water, stormwater, wastewater, electric and the like under this view of the world?

In calling for an increase to \$6 from the present level of \$3 in order to help us meet our local capital needs, I find irony in the fact that the air carriers are allowed to levy \$15 and \$20 surcharges on all tickets to cover the recent spike in fuel costs, while our airports are not allowed to raise their fees to meet expansion needs.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, let me again reiterate how important the AIR-21 legislation is to our efforts to secure our economic future. I was pleased that the Administration in its recent budget request is proposing additional funding commitments to elements of the AIR-21 legislation.

Mayors will continue to press the case for why action on the AIR-21 legislation is so crucial at this time. I note that a recent state-by-state survey reveals that at least \$1.2 billion in projects could be lost for this construction season if AIR-21 is not passed soon.

You should also know that Conference of Mayors President and Denver Mayor Wellington E. Webb has made enactment of AIR-21 one of the organization's top legislative priorities for this year. Mayor Webb also recently released the Conference's "Agenda for America's Cities," which sets forth a 10-point program that emphasizes the importance of infrastructure investment like aviation.

Again, let me thank you, Mr. Chairman, and the Members of the Subcommittee, Chairman Shuster, Ranking Minority Member Oberstar, and the Members of the full Committee for your strong leadership on these matters.

Thank you for this opportunity to appear before you today.