



April 5, 2017

The Honorable Bill Shuster  
Chairman  
Transportation and Infrastructure Committee  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Peter DeFazio  
Ranking Member  
Transportation and Infrastructure Committee  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Thune  
Chairman  
Committee on Commerce, Science,  
and Transportation  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bill Nelson  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Commerce, Science,  
and Transportation  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Shuster, Ranking Member DeFazio, Chairman Thune and Ranking Member Nelson:

As you debate reauthorization of Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) in the coming months, I write to ask for your support of a long-term FAA authorization that maintains Congressional oversight of the nation’s air traffic control system. We are specifically concerned that a recent proposal in Congress to remove oversight of the nation’s air traffic control system, and put this vital infrastructure under the control of a private entity dominated by the commercial airlines, threatens the vital infrastructure that we count on every day.

Rural communities, agriculture and small businesses stand to lose the most under a privatized system, where there would be no Congressional oversight to ensure that all stakeholders and communities have access to air transportation. For example, there are over 5,000 airports across the United States, over 3,300 of which are public-use airports. Yet, there is only commercial service at 509 airports, and airline capacity is dwindling – by about 20 percent in recent years in particular. That means that for the majority of our communities around the country, small airports and general aviation are a literal lifeline to local communities, industries and businesses.

These airport and businesses support local economies and agriculture, connect businesses with far-off plants and customers, and facilitate access to many services, including medical care, disaster relief, organ and blood transport, law enforcement, search-and-rescue, and fire-fighting. They help our businesses stay connected, repair power lines, help farms to survey and protect their crops and allow companies to reach plants in remote areas of the country, among many other uses. In fact, each year, the agricultural aviation industry treats 71 million acres of cropland, out of the 408 million acres of cropland in the United States.

Yet, under a privatized system, a private board dominated by the largest commercial operators would undoubtedly direct resources and investments to the largest hub airports and urban areas where these investments would be most likely to benefit their bottom line. They could also shape and influence the system in many other ways to their benefit, including by leveraging many new fees and taxes, reducing access to airports for lower cost competitors and impeding access to particular airports. It is also unclear how important programs such as the Airport Improvement Program (AIP) would fare, which provide long-term funding in the form of federal grants to both large and small airports around the country, which are a lifeline to local communities and economies.

Agriculture, small businesses and rural communities are the backbone of our nation, and we need to protect our public infrastructure which ensures access to air transportation for communities of all sizes. Please say no to a privatized air traffic control system.

Sincerely,

Agriculture Retailers Association  
Alliance for Aviation Across America  
Crop Life America  
League of Rural Voters  
National Agricultural Aviation Association  
National Council of Agricultural Employers  
National Farmers Union  
National Grange of the Patrons of Husbandry  
National Women in Agriculture Association  
USA Rice Federation