



September 8, 2015

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

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

The Honorable Kelly Ayotte
Chairman
Subcommittee on Aviation Operations, Safety and
Security
Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
United States Senate
144 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Aviation Operations, Safety and
Security
Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
United States Senate
511 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Thune, Chair Ayotte and Ranking Members Nelson and Cantwell:

With only a handful of legislative days remaining before the end of the fiscal year and the expiration of the programs of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), including the Airport Improvement Program (AIP), we are writing to urge you to quickly pass a single, long-term extension of these important programs. This will ensure that federal funding for airport infrastructure projects is not held up as work continues on our shared goal of a multi-year FAA reauthorization bill.

The previous FAA reauthorization bill took four-and-a-half years to complete, required 23 separate short-term extensions, and saw a two-week expiration of FAA programs before Congress finally passed the measure in 2012. Those numerous stop-gap measures – rather than a single, long-term extension early in the process – proved incredibly disruptive to the nation's airport operators who routinely saw their AIP grants delayed because of prolonged uncertainty in Washington. The numerous fits and starts were hard on all airports trying to plan and complete infrastructure projects, but particularly so for smaller airports and those in the northern part of the country that operate with short construction seasons.

Experience has shown that short-term extensions do little to force congressional action. They do, however, cause a great deal of harm to the economy, to the nation's aviation system, and to communities across the country. We hope that Congress will recognize the very vivid and painful lessons of recent history and avoid repeating those costly mistakes this time around.

The FAA has long noted that it needs an extension of at least six months before issuing any AIP grants to airports. While six months of authority may eventually allow for issuance of some grants by the FAA, that short time-frame itself is insufficient from the airport perspective. Airports need a much longer planning horizon, as well as reliable and predictable funding, in order to move forward with issuing proposal requests and construction contracts for the large and multifaceted infrastructure projects that enhance safety, increase capacity, and reduce delays.

With airports facing more than \$15 billion in annual capital needs, we simply cannot afford to go through another tumultuous period of short-term extensions and potential FAA shutdowns. Airports and the entire aviation system need a “safety net” to ensure that the mistakes of the past are not repeated once again.

In order to avoid the disruption that airports experienced during the last bill, airport operators are calling on Congress to pass a single extension of at least a year and up to two years. As we learned the last time around, even FAA bills with only modest changes can take several years to complete. A 12- to 24-month extension would ensure that federal funding for airport infrastructure remains on track as Congress considers ambitious plans to fundamentally transform the operations and structure of the FAA.

To be clear, passing a single long-term extension does not preclude Congress from finishing a multi-year bill in the near future. It would, however, provide airports with a much-needed safety net to ensure that they aren't subject to the vagaries of larger issues and possible shutdowns.

In addition to passing a single, longer-term FAA extension, airports are continuing to call on Congress to modernize the Passenger Facility Charge and protect AIP funding for the long-term as part of an eventual reauthorization bill. These steps will ensure that airports have the funding they need to build critical infrastructure projects and are prepared for rising passenger levels and growing capital needs.

Thank you for consideration.

Sincerely,



Todd Hauptli
President & CEO
AAAE



Kevin M. Burke
President & CEO
ACI-NA