

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 27, 2017

The Honorable Elaine L. Chao  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Secretary Chao:

Congratulations on your nomination and confirmation as Secretary of Transportation. We look forward to working with you to improve our nation's transportation system.

During your confirmation hearing, you testified in response to a question that any decision on changes to air traffic control (ATC) in the United States needed "to be a dialogue, a great discussion, a national discussion" and would require a "national consensus." We appreciate your commitment to discussion and consensus-building on this important issue. We also agree that the process should involve all stakeholders in carefully evaluating the current ATC system, the costs and benefits of various proposals, and the impact on all who would be affected. Therefore, we urge you to formally begin a dialogue as the Department of Transportation begins to establish policy priorities. We would welcome discussions with you on the structure of this dialogue.

The aviation community is diverse and any proposal to address ATC issues would impact stakeholders including legacy, regional and cargo airlines; FAA employees, general and business aviation; airports; pilots; manufacturers; fixed-based operators; air medical providers; state search and rescues operations; new entrants, such as commercial space providers and unmanned aerial systems; and of course, air travelers themselves. We must also fully involve and consider small, rural and remote communities from across the nation to make certain they have access to air traffic services. Additionally, it is also critical to recognize the needs of federal government users of air traffic services, including national security, defense and intelligent operations, law enforcement, border patrol, and federal research efforts. The Department of Defense is itself a provider of air traffic services. We have heard concerns from many of these stakeholders regarding previous proposals to make major changes to the ATC system.

While there are many criteria to consider when evaluating proposals, safety must be our first priority. Our current ATC system has an unparalleled record of safety while accommodating 50,000 flights per day and more than 700 million air travelers per year. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) recently reported that significant restructuring of ATC operations in other countries required seven years on average and stated that such restructuring in the United States "could be more complicated than in other countries because the U.S. ATC system is bigger and more diverse than any other system in the world." Care must also be given to the roles and responsibilities for safety decisions shared between different FAA personnel, including the current air traffic organization. Any proposal must be thoroughly vetted, particularly if it


creates a transition period which could disrupt system safety or hinder NextGen as key programs reach critical milestones.

We encourage you to formally begin a dialogue toward stakeholder consensus based on these concepts. We look forward to working with you to improve the United States' air traffic control system in a way that benefits all users, communities, as well as our nation's defense and security requirements. We must also maintain the world's highest safety standards and ensure continued American leadership in aviation for years to come.

Sincerely,



Jerry Moran  
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator