



STATEMENT OF

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DUPAGE COUNTY, ILLINOIS**

**ON BEHALF OF THE
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES**

**ON
AIRPORT IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM**

**BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON AVIATION
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND
INFRASTRUCTURE**

**MARCH 28, 2007
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

Mr. Chairman:

Good morning. My name is James Healy and I am a County Board Member from DuPage County, Illinois. Today I am representing the National Association of Counties (NACo), which represents America's 3100 urban, suburban and rural counties.

I am pleased to be here today to provide the House Subcommittee on Aviation with NACo's views on the Airport Improvement Program (AIP), a very important program for our members. Counties own about one-third of the nation's commercial and general aviation airports. This includes some of the largest commercial airports in the United States, including those hubs in Miami, Las Vegas, Cincinnati, Milwaukee, Fort Lauderdale, and Orange County, California. We also own, or have county representatives on airport authorities, at many small airports with commercial service, such as the Williamson County Regional Airport in Illinois and the Outagamie Regional Airport in Wisconsin. And of course, counties operate hundreds of general aviation (GA) airports, including the facility owned by my county, the DuPage Airport, the fourth busiest airport in Illinois and a reliever for O'Hare.

NACo adopted its policy earlier this month at its Legislative Conference on the Reauthorization of the Federal Aviation and Airport Program. Much of the policy related to the AIP program. Airports are going to become substantially more congested, with more enplanements, and the existing infrastructure, both airside and landside, will be strained by that increased usage. For instance, Williamson County Regional Airport has a five-year \$6.6 million capital improvement plan. Our experience is that capacity has infrequently been overestimated and has frequently been underestimated or suffered from lack of investment.

To that end, we recommend that the AIP program be funded at a level of no less than \$4 billion annually during the reauthorization period of the next aviation bill. Further, we support guaranteed funding of the AIP program through the existing point of order

provisions or an even stronger guarantee. We note that the House Budget Resolution assumes AIP funding that averages about \$4 billion per year over the next four years. The AIP program has increased from \$1.9 billion in 2000 to \$3.5 billion in 2007 and the need for that increase was apparent. Certainly one way to help ensure that higher funding occurs is to index the revenue sources of the Aviation Trust Fund, such as the ticket tax and fuel taxes, and adjust them annually. NACo believes the current revenue structure, in place since 1970, and revenue sources for funding the AIP program have worked. We also note that the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) proposed funding of the Trust Fund would come from a 13.6 cent fuel tax and is likely to lead to a substantially smaller AIP program. Also, an unknown is whether the proposed 70 cent fuel tax on GA may lead to lower consumption and hence less revenue.

In this context, NACo would oppose a user fee based on air traffic control usage imposed on General Aviation as this would be counterproductive and lead to lower usage of those county-owned facilities. In many cases this would mean less revenue for the airports. This would undermine the investments that county governments have made in such facilities.

In connection with revenue raising, NACo does support allowing local sponsors to increase the Passenger Facility Charges (PFC) to a level of no less than \$6.00. Of course, if this happens we cannot accurately predict how many airports will take advantage of the increase and how much revenue will be generated.

Airport sponsors must have the flexibility to invest AIP and PFC funds. In particular, the AIP program, which is the less flexible of the two, should allow for more investment in landside and off airport capital projects that are closely related to the operation and success of an airport. That includes roads, interchanges and public transit that are integral components to the growth and sustainability of the airport. The priorities of the owners of the airports must be recognized. As elected officials and consumers we all know that easy and fast access to airports, particularly commercial airports, is an important part of the overall flying experience. Without diminishing the need for

improvements to runways and taxiways, as a county official responsible for finding funds to pay for all projects to improve service for users of our airports, we need to pay attention to funding all projects related to airport development. While passengers need to be assured of the dependability of their flights, they also need to feel they can get to the airport easily and on time. This is especially true given all the extra time passengers need at airports for security procedures. In federal transportation policy in general, it is also important to begin moving away from the silo approach to mobility and begin to think of a comprehensive system for moving our citizens.

NACo members, particularly those owning and operating GA airports, are running into certain restrictions being imposed on what can be funded with AIP dollars. At DuPage Airport, our application for funding for a larger emergency response vehicle more appropriate for our fleet mix has been denied. While such vehicles are eligible by statute for AIP funding, the FAA has stated that funding our request would set a precedent for funding all GA airports requests for firefighting vehicles. While not a commercial airport, we have large corporate aircraft using our airport equivalent in size to regional jets now routinely utilized by commercial airlines, and we need increased emergency response capacity. Allowing us to use AIP funds for these purposes does not tie FAA into doing so at every small GA airport. We also need to be able to use AIP funds for better security, such as the purchase of automatic access control systems. Again, we are a large GA airport in the Chicago metropolitan area and we need to address the security issues of the post-9-11 era. If AIP funds cannot be used for such projects, a new federal program for GA airports needs to be created and funded.

Outagamie County, Wisconsin is a member of NACo and operates the Outagamie County Regional Airport, a commercial airport in Appleton, Wisconsin. The AIP program has allowed this facility to expand and better serve a region of 400,000-500,000 people. The county is currently involved in a \$7.2 million parking/access project but is unable to use AIP funds for a new road into the airport and other related expenses.

We have received feedback from some of our members regarding the eight-state AIP block grant program. In summary, it simply imposes another unnecessary administrative layer between the airports and the FAA and the state aviation agencies often provide a lower level of service than the FAA. We recommend the elimination of this program and permit airports to work directly with the FAA. Where smaller GA airports don't have the expertise to prepare grant documentation, nothing prevents them from getting the technical assistance of the state agencies.

Finally, we urge the subcommittee to look for ways to minimize the delays in the environmental permitting process for AIP, PFC and other capital projects. There needs to be better coordination between agencies and a more concurrent approval process.

This completes my testimony and I would be happy to answer any questions that members of the subcommittee may have.