

STATEMENT OF
THE HONORABLE JERRY F. COSTELLO
SUBCOMMITTEE ON AVIATION
HEARING ON
“NEXTGEN: AREA AVIGATION (RNAV) AND REQUIRED NAVIGATION PERFORMANCE (RNP)”
JULY 29, 2009

➤ I welcome everyone to the Aviation Subcommittee hearing on “NextGen: Area Navigation and Required Navigation Performance.” The deployment of RNAV and RNP procedures are key near- to mid-term NextGen initiatives.

RNAV and RNP procedures are part of the Federal Aviation Administration’s (FAA) NextGen Implementation Plan, and are expected to be a major part of the NextGen Mid-Term Implementation Task Force’s final report that is due next month.

➤ RNAV and RNP procedures utilize aircraft avionics to enable aircraft to fly shorter and direct routes that reduce fuel usage

and carbon emissions, increase flight capacity, and improve safety.

➤ RNAV and RNP procedures are in high-demand by the airlines, but the FAA faces challenges implementing these procedures. The airlines want direct routes into airports that will save more fuel, instead of overlays of existing ground-based navigational aids. However, the FAA will need to review future airspace changes and the environmental impacts of moving routes and procedures, which can take up to 8 years and cost \$5 million per procedure.

➤ As the FAA implements new and more sophisticated routes, additional air traffic controller training will be required.

However, the U.S. Department of Transportation Inspector

General's (DOT IG) office will testify that the FAA lacks extensive and up-to-date training programs to help controllers understand and manage RNAV and RNP aircraft, and that the FAA's training on new procedures consists of briefings rather than formal courses on RNAV and RNP.

The DOT IG points out that the controller training issue is particularly important given the large number of developmental controllers in the system. I would like to hear from our FAA witness on how they will address the issues raised by the DOT IG's office.

- Given the importance of RNAV and RNP procedures to the industry, it is critical that the FAA articulate a clear strategic vision for how it intends to deploy these procedures.

Looking forward, this Subcommittee will need to evaluate the FAA's strategy for deploying RNAV and RNP procedures

and to know if the FAA is meeting industry stakeholder expectations. Likewise, this Subcommittee will need to understand and evaluate stakeholder expectations and assess whether they can realistically be met given the implementation challenges facing the FAA.

➤ The Senate FAA reauthorization bill requires the FAA to develop a plan to deploy RNAV and RNP procedures at the top 35 airports by 2014, and throughout the entire national airspace system (NAS) by 2018. I believe the Senate’s approach has merit, and that it should be given serious consideration in conference.

➤ In 2007, the FAA entered into agreements with two private “third-party” vendors to design and implement public RNP

procedures. It would be helpful to understand how the FAA plans to use third-party vendors and what role, if any, they are expected to play in NextGen. H.R. 915, the “FAA Reauthorization of 2009”, requires the DOT IG to assess the FAA’s ability to provide safety oversight to third-parties, and I look forward to hearing what the DOT IGs office has determined thus far.

- I also welcome our witness from Jeppesen (Jepp a sen), one of the two private vendors authorized to design and implement RNP public procedures. I would like to know what role Jeppesen believes it can play and what it can offer to the FAA and to airspace users.

➤ Some airlines believe that third-parties can help them obtain more desirable and efficient RNP routes, and might be willing to proactively finance aircraft equipage, pilot training and procedure development in order to obtain them. Southwest has committed \$175 million dollars to equip its aircraft, train its pilots and hire a private vendor to design customized “special” procedures at the airports that it serves. Southwest has begun work at Dallas and Houston.

➤ Earlier this year, the FAA expressed concerns about the proprietary nature of Southwest’s approach before this Subcommittee stating, “The primary concern we have is the proposed operations for the Dallas/Houston project are exclusive to Southwest Airlines, developed with proprietary criteria that may not conform to common flight tracks or other instrument operations at the affected airports.”

➤ Moreover, the DOT IG's office will testify today that FAA officials have expressed additional concerns that other air carriers may follow Southwest and increasingly request customized special procedures at their airports. In turn, this could complicate the workload of air traffic controllers and increase the complexity of the NAS. While I understand that Southwest may have modified its approach, I would like to hear our witnesses elaborate on these concerns and discuss their potential implications.

➤ For its part, Southwest has expressed frustrations with environmental review process associated with deploying RNP procedures. Southwest believes that the environmental review process may hinder its ability to obtain more efficient routes. Without more efficient routes, the company may not

see the return needed to justify its investment. I would like to hear our witness from Southwest tell us what he thinks that Congress and the FAA can do.

- Before I recognize Mr. Petri for his opening statement, I ask unanimous consent to allow 2 weeks for all Members to revise and extend their remarks and to permit the submission of additional statements and materials by Members and witnesses. Without objection, so ordered.