OPENING STATEMENT OF
THE HONORABLE JAMES L. OBERSTAR
SUBCOMMITTEE ON AVIATION
HEARING ON
NEXTGEN: AREA NAVIGATION (RNAV) AND REQUIRED NAVIGATION PERFORMANCE (RNP)
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I want to thank Chairman Costello for calling today's hearing on "NextGen: Area Navigation (RNAV) and Required Navigation Performance (RNP)." The deployment of RNAV and RNP procedures are a key near- to mid-term NextGen initiative. RNAV and RNP procedures are featured in the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) NextGen Implementation Plan, and they are expected to be a major part of the RTCA NextGen Mid-Term Implementation Task Force's final report that is due next month.

These procedures, which utilize aircraft avionics to enable aircraft to fly precise, fuel efficient and environmentally friendly routes into and out of airports, hold enormous potential. According to the Government Accountability Office (GAO) during a 12-month period, more than 8,000 RNP approaches at Brisbane, Australia, saved 34 Qantas 737-800 aircraft a total of 4,200 minutes of flying, 65,000 gallons of fuel, and 621 metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions. Since 2005, Alaska Airlines, an early RNP pioneer, has documented 5,300 flights that avoided diversions using RNP procedures. In 2008, avoiding these diversions saved the airline $8 million. I look forward to hearing from Alaska Airline's on their experience.

Because RNAV and RNP hold such potential, they are in high-demand by airlines. The FAA is under pressure to produce more and better quality procedures, and even expand the use of these procedures to seamlessly connect city pairs. There are, however, some implementation challenges that the FAA faces. For example, airlines want more direct routes into airports that will save more fuel, instead of overlays of existing ground-based navigational aids. However, more direct routes could trigger extensive environmental review. In addition, integrating new routes into congested airspace can present significant technical challenges such as complex design requirements that involve computer modeling, human factors studies, and actual flight and simulator trials. MITRE, the FAA's Federally Funded Research and Development Center, is testifying today, and I look forward to hearing more about these technical challenges.

Like other aspects of NextGen, RNAV and RNP will require considerable investment by the industry in both equipping aircraft, and in some instances, training pilots to fly these procedures. For example, Southwest Airlines has committed to invest $175 million to equip its aircraft and train its pilots to fly RNP procedures into the airports it serves. Southwest hired a private company to design "special" customized procedures and has started work at Houston and Dallas. Earlier this year, FAA officials expressed concern to this Subcommittee about the proprietary nature of

Southwest's procedures. I look forward to hearing our witnesses from the FAA, the Department of Transportation Inspector General's (DOT IG) Office and Southwest expand on this issue, and discuss the implications of other airlines following Southwest's approach.

More recently, Southwest has expressed its own concerns over the cost and length of the environmental review process needed to deploy more direct routes, and has indicated that it simply cannot achieve its needed return on investment unless it can obtain more direct routes than those already in use by the FAA. I would like to hear from the FAA and our other witnesses regarding the environmental review process surrounding the deployment of these procedures.

A final issue that concerns me is that, in 2007, the FAA entered into agreements with two non-governmental third-parties (Naverus and Jeppesen) to design and implement FAA "public" RNP procedures. It is unclear to me what role the FAA originally intended for these companies, or how they fit into FAA's NextGen plans. We have a witness here from Jeppesen that will talk about the role the company envisions for itself, and what services it thinks it can provide to the FAA. In addition, the president of the union representing technicians and specialists

who certify and maintain FAA equipment and procedures, the Professional Aviation Safety Specialists, has repeatedly expressed doubts about the FAA's ability to adequately regulate, supervise or review the work of third-party RNP design initiatives. H.R. 915, the "FAA Reauthorization Act of 2009", requires the DOT IG to assess the FAA's reliance on third-parties for development of new procedures and determine the FAA's ability to provide oversight. I would like to hear from the DOT IG's office what it has found so far.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.