



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

**Testimony of Representative Earl Blumenauer Before the House Committee on
Transportation & Infrastructure
April 18, 2023**

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Earl Blumenauer".

Chair Graves, Ranking Member Larsen, thank you for the opportunity to testify before this committee today.

Air travel is in flux right now. After two years where many of us often felt like the only person on a plane, airports are humming again. I walk around and it feels busier than ever. Yet people are stressed and on edge. I hear more worry about the environmental impact of both personal and business trips than I ever have in the past. Pilots and flight attendants are still exhausted from three years of the pandemic. Sometimes it feels like everyone in the airport is miserable. These are challenging times to be flying, to be dependent on flying, and to be making policy for the next five years of flying.

You will hear a lot from my colleagues today on a myriad of issues, so I am just going to focus on three that I think will get less attention but are important issues for us to think about:

First, preparing our airports for whatever comes next:

Our airports are places for business and personal travel, they are also critical access points for emergency services and management. Just last week the Fort Lauderdale airport was shut down for more than a day after getting 24 inches of rain in a 24 hour period. We saw significantly more cancellations and airport shut downs than normal this winter due to extreme snow and ice. In the Pacific Northwest, airports are suddenly having to withstand multiples days and even weeks above 100 degrees. These once-in-a-century events are happening every other year now: for the sake of our economy, our airports need to be built or upgraded to be able to withstand these types of extreme weather events.

Similarly, airports play a special role and function in emergency response, which means they must be prepared to withstand the emergency. My hometown airport, PDX, will have to serve as a main point of operations after a major earthquake. This is common and I bet that most of your district's emergency plans heavily rely on the functionality of the closest airport.

The only problem is that it's unlikely any of their runways would survive a major earthquake.

I urge the Committee to include language in FAA reauthorization that mirrors what was in a previous bill passed by the Committee (and abandoned by the Senate), which would provide

grants to airports to invest in their runways to enable them to withstand the types of extreme weather events, earthquakes and other natural disasters we are seeing more and more of.

Second, ensure airports can finance need improvements for travelers health, safety, and comfort:

In previous Congresses' I have introduced a bill to increase the Passenger Facility Charge to align with inflation. That charge hasn't been increased since 2003 and is wildly inadequate compared to the need and expectations for today's airport facilities. I know that these are hard conversations and I'm not here today to tell you what the answer should be. But I do know that, as wonderful as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law is, if we don't take steps to sustainably pay for our infrastructure needs, to invest in the airports and the runways and the security systems that we need, passing a huge piece of infrastructure investment every seventy years is not going to be enough.

I urge the Committee to engage in a robust discussion about long-term investment in our aviation system, the importance of the user-fee system, and ensuring airports meet the needs of modern travelers.

Third, finally, I ask the Committee to remember that people getting to the airport is as important as moving them through the airport. This Committee has previously acknowledged the importance of consistent, reliable transit connections to the airport. Most of the major international airports in the US are upgrading their transit connections to the airport, both for the people using the airport and for the people working at the airport. I hope that the Committee remembers that connections between an airport and the closest urban area can be as important to the functioning of the airport as the actual flight.

Thank you for your time today.