

Testimony of the Honorable Marcy Kaptur
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Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure of the U.S. House of Representatives
2023 Member Day Hearing
April 18, 2023, 10 a.m. EST

Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Larsen, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the economic development and aviation legislative priorities that I encourage the Committee to consider this year.

I urge the Committee to support critical federal investments in regional economic development by reauthorizing the Economic Development Administration, the federal regional economic development commissions, and the Great Lakes Authority. The Economic Development Administration has been operating without congressional authorization since 2008 and the authorizations of appropriations for the Southeast Crescent Regional Commission, the Southwest Border Regional Commission, the Northern Border Regional Commission, and the Great Lakes Authority expire this fiscal year. The Northern Great Plains Regional Authority's authorization of appropriations lapsed in 2018; it has not received funding since 2004. And the Delta Regional Authority's authority to operate will sunset on October 1, 2023 unless amendatory legislation is enacted. Supporting regional economic development is crucial to ensure that the United States remains a global leader. My region in the Great Lakes, for example, contains the core of the United States' commercial and defense industrial base, as well as the largest system of accessible surface freshwater in the world. The Great Lakes supply drinking water for more than 30 million Americans, support over 1.5 million jobs that generate \$62 billion in wages each year, and provide habitat for over 3,500 species of plants and animals. At the same time, the Great Lakes Region has struggled with job loss, underinvestment, deindustrialization, invasive species, toxic chemical contamination, habitat loss, coastal erosion, and beach closures.

In order to tackle the significant regional economic and environmental challenges facing Great Lakes watershed communities in the eight states of Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, and New York, we must empower the Great Lakes Authority to identify and advance regional solutions. Establishing a revolving fund for grants and loans and vesting the Great Lakes Authority with financing powers will allow the Great Lakes Authority to sustain investments in the larger and more complex projects that are critical to regional economic development, without compromising the provision of traditional assistance to local development districts. And because these powers will ultimately reduce the Authority's reliance on appropriations, the federal taxpayer will also benefit from an updated reauthorization of the Great Lakes Authority.

In addition, I encourage the Committee to include provisions in the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Reauthorization Bill to address challenges facing small community airports. These airports can be tremendous drivers of local and regional economic development, attracting investment and generating good-paying jobs by connecting people and businesses to the global air transportation system. Despite the numerous economic challenges facing small community airports due to the pandemic, supply chain disruptions, and workforce shortages, they continue to find creative ways to persevere. The Committee can help these airports pivot, survive and, ultimately, flourish by considering the following measures, among others: (1) removing the \$20 million cap on the amount of discretionary funds allowed in terminal projects at non-hub airports under the Airport Improvement Program (AIP); (2) modernizing the general aviation entitlements under the AIP by increasing funding levels for airports with more activity; (3) increasing the authorization of appropriations for the Small Community Air Service Development Program; (4) extending and increasing funding for Aviation Workforce Development grants; and (5) directing the FAA to increase the efficiency of its grant award processes and to provide greater deference to airport sponsors on the application of federal funds to eligible activities.

Further, I support empowering the FAA to consider the economic development goals of the local communities served by small airports when rendering decisions on small community airport development plans. I urge the Committee to enhance the FAA's discretion to modify airport grant assurances when doing so will provide clear economic benefits to the local or regional economy while avoiding appreciable impacts to civil aviation.

Finally, I encourage the Committee to enhance the FAA's authority to help airports become more resilient and sustainable in the face of extreme weather events and ever-increasing threats to our nation's energy independence. More than ever, airports across the country need federal assistance to adapt to extreme weather events and to increase reliance on domestic alternative energy and fuel sources. I support dedicated funding for programs for resilient and sustainable infrastructure, emissions reduction, and energy efficiency at airports.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify, and thank you for the work you do in service to the American people.