



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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OPENING REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION JOHN A. VOLPE, AT THE NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD HEARING ON MID-AIR COLLISIONS, DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE AUDITORIUM, WASHINGTON, D.C., TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 1969, 9:30 A.M.

I welcome the opportunity to come here this morning to join the National Transportation Safety Board in taking a close, probing look at a matter that is of great concern to everyone who travels. The Office of the Secretary of Transportation will watch the proceedings here with keen interest, and will be most cooperative in assisting in any way we can.

The prevention of mid-air collisions is -- to a very real extent -- the full-time job of some 19,000 trained experts in our Federal Aviation Administration's air traffic control service. It is also a major pre-occupation of our research and development specialists. The matter of maintaining separation in the airspace -- and after all the "maintenance of separation" is the same as saying the "prevention of collision" -- is also a primary concern to our FAA flight inspection pilots. It is also a major purpose behind the establishment of some 4,000 navigational aid facilities and the people who operate them.

In the broadest sense, all Federal Aviation Administration personnel contribute in one way or another to the massive effort of preventing collisions between aircraft. Yet, at the same time, there is nobody in

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the entire Department who can in any way claim to have all the answers to the problem.

The matter is of such seriousness that we welcome any positive contribution from any source -- any suggestion that will give us any additional measure of safety in the air.

Mr. Jack Shaffer, our Federal Aviation Administrator, will testify later in this hearing and report to you on his continuing efforts to lessen this hazard. I know, personally, of his constant and deep concern about this problem. It is never far from his mind. And I should like to emphasize that his approach and the approach of all his people is not confined only to actual maintenance of separation through air traffic control operations. They are trying from every angle -- better training of pilots, improved equipment, improved procedures, constant study, improved weather reporting and on through hundreds of other efforts. And all this work is lessening the possibility of mid-air collisions. We are succeeding.

None of us can stand still, however. We shall soon be seeing the advent of the high capacity jet air carriers -- airplanes capable of carrying as many as 500 passengers at once. The air carrier fleet itself is expanding and the general aviation fleet is expanding even more rapidly. Within this general aviation fleet -- it must be pointed out -- are appearing growing numbers of high performance jet aircraft. There is on top of this an increasing average daily utilization of many of these aircraft. This increase of activity, finally, tends to occur in a limited number of busy areas.

At the same time -- and this is, I think -- the key to the problem -- the number of facilities and personnel supporting these operations have not kept pace. There is, today, not enough of just about everything.

There are two major approaches to this dilemma. One is to restrict or limit operations. And we are doing this. We have installed a quota system at our five busiest terminals and this has been effective.

But this approach satisfies nobody. It is a stop gap solution at best.

The only proper approach to this problem is to expand our airport capacity and our air traffic and navigation system. And this is what we are seeking in the proposed "Aviation Facilities Expansion Act of 1969." This measure, if passed, will give us the personnel and the tools to control air traffic efficiently and safely. No other single proposal or recommendation will do as much to minimize the hazard of mid-air collisions as the passage of this legislation.

This is our major effort. With the adoption of this measure, we can move and expand and improve our air traffic control system. We can bring in more people; we can add much-needed automated equipment; we can help with the construction of 900 new airports and the expansion of over 2,700 existing airports. All of these will mean a very significant lessening

of the danger of mid-air collisions. There is no other action that will do as much.

As I noted earlier, however, we are not standing still. We are seeking improvement. We are interested in any measure that promises even the slightest increment of safety. I, and my staff will, then, be following the testimony at this hearing with close attention. I assure you moreover, I personally, shall study the recommendations that emerge. Of all the challenges that became mine with the acceptance of my office, none has concerned me more than this task of minimizing the hazard of aircraft collision in flight.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, let me assure you of my complete support and cooperation with your hearing.

I thank you for the opportunity to speak to you.

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