



South Metro Airport Action Council

Senator Al Franken
Senator Amy Klobuchar
Representative Keith Ellison
Representative Tim Walz
Washington, DC

December 29, 2010

Dear Friends:

The South Metro Airport Action Council again asks for your attention to provisions of FAA Re-Authorization and funding that may adversely impact MSP. We agree with much of DOT/IG Scovel's recent report.

Safety. Although daily use of MSP for scheduled flights is down 16% compared to the busiest year (2005), the airport still operates as a Delta Airlines hub with daily peak-hour congestion at levels the same as before. FAA reasonably needs to maintain MSP air traffic control capability at 2005 levels or reduce rates. See

<http://www.quiettheskies.org/smaacforum/index.php?board=28.0>

Instead, more flights are now by contract operators ("Regional airlines"); with less-experienced crews on the ground and in the air working longer hours, typically, than their major airline counterparts. FAA reasonably needs to improve air traffic and ground traffic systems (or reduce peak rates) and increase inspections and investigations of the now more diversified aircraft, air crew certification and behavior, maintenance facilities and procedures, and emergency readiness. See also

<http://quiettheskies.org/LTCP/ltcpindex.html>

The Metropolitan Airports Commission is planning an additional \$1 billion in capital improvements to add gates at both terminals, increasing the number of aircraft using MSP at peak hours. The MSP airfield is small and the responsibility for ground traffic management and safety is divided between the airlines and the FAA. Funding for ground safety systems and for replacing retiring controllers has been limited or cut, and there is little or no change in this trend in the FAA re-authorization pending in the Congress.

FAA programs for deploying improved airport air traffic control (ATC) systems have been cut or delayed. However, the FAA is allowing airlines more autonomy flying between airports. While these changes may reduce fuel use, more use of hubs like MSP increases the length of most trips. Further, the hand-offs from en route to airport control would be less predictable at airports. There is serious doubt that Next Gen development is an answer.

Noise and Pollution. FAA review of MSP Part 150 Noise Compatibility Plans was stymied in 2003 because a continuing resolution kept the "Lott amendment" in effect. The matter of mitigation by insulating buildings in certain neighborhoods was settled using noise exposure maps that no longer represent flight paths and other procedures.

High Local Fares. The Delta affiliates congesting MSP at peak hours today have fewer seats than the ones used by Northwest in 2005. That is, for the same number of hourly or daily flights, overall passenger capacity is less and supply is often limited. The effect can be seen in high fares and a less-than-national increase in travel through MSP: compared to 2009.

Sincerely,

James R. Spensley

James R. Spensley,
President