



Metropolitan Airports Commission
March 17, 2011

Dear Commissioners and Director Hamiel:

On March 16, the US House of Representatives Ways and Means Committee was scheduled to mark up H.R.1034, the *Airport and Airway Trust Fund Financing Reauthorization Act of 2011*, introduced by Chairman Dave Camp (R-Mich.). If it passes, the bill will extend aviation trust fund taxes and the FAA's authority to spend the funds until October 2014. This four-year bill sets the same date as the FAA Reauthorization and Reform Act (H.R.658). As far as we can tell, neither bill specifies how or where the appropriations will be spent.

The House and Senate are out of session March 21-25, and the last chance for the House to pass either bill appears to be the week of March 28, since the April 18-29 Spring Recess may not allow a House-passed bill to go to conference with the Senate before the current authority expires. So another short-term extension is almost a certainty.

There is no way to assure that needed safety improvements at MSP will be funded, including Next Gen and MSP Tower training and levels of controller staffing. Ground safety systems supporting traffic increases during and after gate construction and remodeling as in the Long-Term Comprehensive Plan are not forthcoming or will be delayed by years. If the economic recovery continues, airline service (passenger capacity) increases at MSP appear to be a restoration of Delta/SkyTeam schedules *at peak hours*.

SMAAC and similar citizen organizations urged Congress to be more thorough evaluators of air traffic control systems and technologies. Since 2006, when FAA development, staffing, and systems repair and upgrade programs were cut or abandoned, in favor of the overly ambitious and technologically unproven Next Generation concept, progress has been unclear and not appropriately funded.

The Commission can restate its position that MSP is *safe enough* to support daily operational levels with the same concentrations at peak hours as in *2005 through 2018 or whenever advanced systems are deployed*, in spite of reduced air traffic controller and airline staffs, old systems, and more contract operators. Or the Commission can work with FAA and Congress to restore service more slowly, control "slots" and schedules to reduce congestion and the attendant risks, until improved systems are deployed.

Sincerely,

James R. Spensley, President,
South Metro Airport Action Council (SMAAC)

Copies: Senator Al Franken, Senator Amy Klobuchar,
Representative Keith Ellison, Representative Betty McCollum,
Representative Tim Walz