

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 5, 2009

J. Randolph Babbitt
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20591

Dear Administrator Babbitt:

We are writing to congratulate you on your confirmation as Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and to request your assistance in addressing serious safety concerns at the Santa Monica Airport. The airport is located in the 30th Congressional District of California, which is represented by Representative Waxman, and a portion falls within the 36th Congressional District, which is represented by Representative Harman. Since the beginning of the year, there have been two serious accidents at the airport.

Santa Monica Airport is a unique General Aviation facility. Built in 1922, the airport has no runway safety areas, which are now required by the FAA to reduce damage and loss of life in the event that an aircraft overshoots the runway or fails to lift off. The airport's single runway is bordered by steep hills, public streets, and densely populated neighborhoods on both sides, with homes as close as 250 feet from the runway. As flight traffic at the airport has increased over the years, particularly among larger jets, so have concerns that any accident not contained by the runway would pose a great risk to the surrounding neighborhood.

For nearly a decade, we have joined the community, the City of Santa Monica and the Airport Administration to push the FAA to address this serious safety gap. While the FAA has had discussions with the City, the agency's response has been marked by delay and ambiguity. On one occasion agency staff in the FAA's Office of Airport Safety Standards withdrew a proposal hours before a forum organized by the City of Santa Monica to receive public comments. Most recently, the FAA proposed changes that could seriously undermine the emergency response capability at the airport and may be insufficient to stop a larger jet from an overrun into the surrounding streets and homes.

Last year, when talks were again stalled, we asked House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure Chairman James Oberstar to convene a meeting of the parties, which took place on January 28, 2008. Unfortunately, the meeting failed to provide a starting point for meaningful discussions. On May 21, 2009, Chairman Oberstar worked with Representative Waxman to include an amendment in H.R. 915, the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2009, expressing "the sense of Congress that the FAA should enter into good faith discussions with the City of Santa Monica to achieve runway safety area solutions consistent with FAA design guidelines to address safety concerns at Santa Monica Airport."

We urge you to bring a fresh perspective to this issue and fulfill that call to action. Our constituents and the crews and passengers who use Santa Monica Airport deserve to have the confidence that airport operations meet FAA safety guidelines and go beyond the barest minimum enhancements previously proposed by the FAA.

Thank you for your assistance. We look forward to meeting with you to discuss this issue further.

Sincerely,



HENRY A. WAXMAN
Member of Congress



JANE HARMAN
Member of Congress