

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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TRB Committee on Airfield and Airspace  
Capacity and Delay

Forecasts of future operations at major U.S. airports suggest that demand will far exceed the capacity now available. Furthermore, there is a strong consensus that the present programs in the public and private sectors will not meet the needs of expected near- and long-term growth. Flight delays are already a major concern to airlines and the traveling public, with little relief in sight.

This Special Meeting brought together many outstanding minds in contemporary aviation representing the public and private sectors for the purpose of reviewing the outlook for airport and airspace capacity and to discuss current programs and policy that address the gap between future needs and the forecast capability. The participants were organized into working groups to discuss issues and exchange viewpoints. The meeting concluded by assembling the total attendance for expression of consensus and ideas.

Perhaps the most significant expression of the group was that there is a major problem with the present system and with the outlook for the future system from the standpoint of capacity. This will become manifest by ever-increasing delays and constrained operations, even if all the projects in the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) National Airspace System (NAS) plan and municipal airport programs are completed. Only a minor part of the needs will be satisfied by the current plans. This should not, however, detract from the importance of vigorously continuing to pursue current plans.

Session leaders reported that a number of on-going programs should receive greater levels of attention and priority, and recommended that more effective ways be found to develop responsive policies and programs for the near and further term. In addition, it was felt that the FAA research and development program needs sharper definition, increased funding and greater recognition within the FAA itself. The absence of a "post-NAS" program or system design for the next-generation system is perceived to reflect preoccupation with current hardware implementation to the detriment of the future. With regard to the current program, greater effort should be made to reduce wake vortex

separation requirements. There is a significant difference of opinion regarding technological potential for relief. Likewise, the achievement of VFR flow rates during IFR conditions should be more vigorously pursued.

It was agreed that lack of technology is not the underlying problem. Rationalizing the application of technology does seem to be a problem for the future system designers. Concrete is known as the greatest achiever of capacity, whether obtained through additional runways and taxiways at existing major airports, expanded use of secondary airports near major hubs or new airports to serve major population centers. This cannot be achieved through technology alone, but must involve the public and private sectors interacting in some way that is not happening under the present system.

There were strong expressions of the need to establish some kind of high-level entity composed of government and industry to advise Congress or the FAA Administrator on how to systematically reassess the present program and policy. In-place institutions are judged inadequate to achieve the macro changes needed. An "Advisory Board," composed of experts who could address the technical, social, and institutional issues at a national level, was suggested to deal with this problem.

The assemblage recognized the excellent efforts of the Industry Task Force on Airport Capacity Improvement and Delay Reduction, which, under Don Reilly's chairmanship, has been providing inputs to the FAA administrator. There were a number of suggestions that additional activity be undertaken either under the Transportation Research Board or under the Industry Task Force with the objective of bringing greater focus to bear on some selected targets where nearer-term payoff may be possible. This might be achieved through bringing government and industry together in small groups consisting of a mix of highly expert persons who could develop recommended approaches in high-payoff areas.

In summary, it was the sense of the meeting that the current national program has serious limitations in dealing with problems of future system capacity. Furthermore, the nature of the limitations require high-level policy attention, since they are not simply solvable through minor reorientation of present programs.