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March 3, 2008

The Honorable Patty Murray, Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and
Urban Development, and Related Agencies
133 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Madam Chairwoman:

As the Subcommittee begins to develop the FY09 Department of Transportation and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, the more than 415,000 members of the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) would like to express its appreciation for your efforts on behalf of the general aviation community. We have examined the FAA's budget request and would like to provide our comments on several initiatives that would provide immediate benefits to general aviation and improve FAA operations.

First, AOPA supports language prohibiting the FAA from finalizing or implementing any regulation that would promulgate new aviation user fees not specifically authorized by law. The Subcommittee has consistently viewed this language as necessary in the past, and it is even more critical today in light of the Administration's renewed call for a new cost-based, user fee funding mechanism for the FAA. Despite the fact that this prohibition was contained in the FY08 Consolidated Appropriations Act, the Administration's FY09 budget proposal assumes the FAA will implement user fees in 2010. Therefore, we encourage the Subcommittee to include language preventing the FAA from unilaterally implementing user fees.

Second, AOPA supports funding the Airport Improvement Program (AIP) at the proposed FY09 authorized level of \$3.9 billion. This program provides grants to fund vital airport development projects such as airfield capital improvements and repairs, navigational aids, airfield lighting, and land acquisition. The Administration's proposed \$1.1 billion cut to this program will hurt thousands of communities across the country that rely solely on transportation access provided by general aviation airports. By law, an AIP funding level below \$3.2 billion results in dramatic changes to the formulas, effectively eliminating entitlement funding for thousands of general aviation airports. Elimination of this funding would adversely affect communities' ability to maintain and improve their airports.

Third, AOPA supports the Administration's goal to "maintain an aggressive quality assurance program to monitor Flight Service performance in Alaska and through the Lockheed Martin FS21 contract, addressing reduction of operational deficiencies in all areas." Last year, the flight service station consolidation and modernization was plagued with numerous problems including system outages, excessive hold times, lost flight plans, dropped calls and poor quality service. Unfortunately, some of these problems persist today -- there was another system outage on February 6, 2008. AOPA thanks the Subcommittee leadership and continued oversight of FAA's management controls for the flight service stations.

Fourth, AOPA supports the Administration's budget request of \$300 million for Automatic Dependant Surveillance-Broadcast (ADS-B) to implement the program nationwide. ADS-B is an advanced surveillance technology that combines a satellite positioning service, aircraft avionics, and ground infrastructure to enable more accurate transmission of information between aircraft and air traffic control. On October 2, 2007, the FAA issued a proposed rule mandating costly ADS-B equipage by 2020 with no new benefits for general aviation. Both the DOT Inspector General and the Government Accountability Office recently testified that stakeholder acceptance and equipage are going to be key to air traffic control modernization. Unfortunately, the proposed rule makes ADS-B an additional requirement to Mode C transponders. This is because the traffic alert and collision avoidance system (TCAS) used by commercial airlines does not recognize the ADS-B signal. Yet the FAA has not explored other options. AOPA requests the Subcommittee to direct the FAA to develop a transponder replacement strategy.

Fifth, AOPA supports the Administration's budget request of \$99 million for Wide Area Augmentation System (WAAS), including \$15 million for WAAS surveys and approach procedure development. WAAS is a cost effective satellite navigation system that improves safety, increases capacity and provides all weather access for general aviation pilots. WAAS replaces the very expensive Instrument Landing Systems (ILS). As a result of Subcommittee's efforts to fund this vital program, there are currently over 1,000 WAAS approaches. AOPA urges the committee to maintain its commitment to WAAS and requests that at least \$10 million be used to survey, develop, and publish WAAS approaches at non-Part 139 certificated airports without an ILS. The FAA has already begun to phase out ground-based navigation systems, making the availability of WAAS and incentives for pilots to transition to satellite navigation that much more important.

Sixth, AOPA supports the Administration's stated goals for continued research in the area of propulsion and fuel systems for general aviation aircraft. General aviation aircraft operate on 100 Octane leaded aviation gasoline (commonly known as 100LL Avgas). Environmental concerns and growing economic and supply related issues make the future availability 100LL Avgas uncertain. AOPA requests \$750,000 to develop technologies for modifications of existing general aviation piston engines to enable their safe operation using unleaded aviation fuel as well as possible replacement formulations for 100LL.

And lastly, the Administration's plan for safely integrating unmanned aircraft systems (UASs) into the National Airspace System does not call for the development of certification or airworthiness standards until 2015. With the expanded use of UASs in domestic airspace by government, commercial and private industry, AOPA strongly believes the FAA must make this a priority. AOPA requests the Subcommittee direct the FAA to report back to Congress with a comprehensive plan for the safe integration of UASs into the NAS by March 2010.

Thank you for considering these critical initiatives. We realize the constraints under which the Subcommittee operates, and respectfully request your continued support of general aviation by supporting these key initiatives.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Phil Boyer". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Phil Boyer