

**STATEMENT OF SAMUEL K. SKINNER
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THE COMMERCIAL CLUB OF CHICAGO**

**Hearing on the National Aviation Capacity Expansion Act (S. 1786)
before the Subcommittee on Aviation,
Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation,
U.S. Senate**

March 21, 2002

Chairman Rockefeller and Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of the Civic Committee of The Commercial Club of Chicago – a group of approximately 70 senior executives from the Chicago region’s leading corporations, businesses, and professional firms – I respectfully submit this statement in support of S. 1786 – the National Aviation Capacity Expansion Act. The member companies of the Civic Committee have offices and plants throughout Chicago and its suburbs, as well as across the country and the world. We have employees who use O’Hare for business and/or personal travel. We clearly have a huge stake in the economic and aviation future of the region and the nation.

This legislation will ratify in Congress the bi-partisan agreement reached by Chicago Mayor Richard Daley and Illinois Governor George Ryan on December 5, 2001, to expand aviation capacity in the Chicago region. The agreement between Governor Ryan and Mayor Daley was historic. In making this pact they overcame a decades-long political stalemate that had blocked meaningful and much-needed improvements in the Chicago region’s aviation system. The Civic Committee commends the Governor and Mayor for setting aside political differences to settle this issue locally.

For nearly 20 years, the Civic Committee has been advocating expansion and modernization of O’Hare Airport. The agreement between the Governor and Mayor not only provides for such improvements at O’Hare, but also provides for a new point-to-point airport in south suburban Peotone, and the preservation of Meigs Field in Chicago; and we wholeheartedly support the terms of this agreement.

As a former U.S. Secretary of Transportation and now as the CEO of a Chicago-based transportation company, I have a deep understanding of the importance of a strong and efficient aviation system. The airport agreement between Governor Ryan and Mayor Daley is good not

just for Illinois, but for the entire county. Accordingly, the Civic Committee respectfully asks Congress to approve the agreement to ensure that it is not

reversed or undermined by future political discord in Illinois and to expedite the implementation of these projects. O'Hare Airport is the busiest airport in the world and a key hub in the national aviation system, and we believe that Congressional action to improve the airport is both justified and necessary.

In the absence of Congressional approval, any federal funding allocated to these projects could be wasted if construction were begun and then halted by future Illinois officials. Worse yet, O'Hare modernization, which is at least 10 years overdue, and the construction of a new point-to-point airport in the region could be delayed indefinitely. This is not the proper way to improve the nation's aviation infrastructure.

O'Hare provides thousands of daily flights to over 165 domestic and over 70 international destinations. Both United and American Airlines operate strong networks of connecting flights and schedules at O'Hare; and over 60 other commercial, commuter and cargo airlines operate out of the airport. Only about half of the passengers using O'Hare originate or terminate their trips at the airport; the other half of the passengers use O'Hare as a connecting point to another destination. Similarly, many air freight shippers use O'Hare as an intermediate point for their freight shipments. In short, O'Hare provides a vital service in the movement of both passengers and cargo across the country.

However, O'Hare operates with an out-dated design of intersecting runways, which makes the airport vulnerable to significant delays, especially in bad weather. Flight delays and declining service at O'Hare adversely impact not only the people of Northern Illinois, but also the citizens and businesses in other states, creating a ripple effect throughout the country. Chicago has not added new runway facilities at O'Hare for decades.

The agreement between Governor Ryan and Mayor Daley to expand and modernize O'Hare to allow for eight total runways, six of them parallel, would provide substantial benefits to the national aviation system. It would dramatically reduce congestion and increase safety at O'Hare, freeing up the national system as a whole, and would provide the needed capacity for additional flights around the country and the world. The agreement also provides for a new airport in Peotone, which would allow the Chicago region flexibility to accommodate the significant growth projected in point-to-point traffic, and preserves Meigs Field, a valuable general aviation asset for Chicago and the nation.

The airport agreement between the Governor and Mayor is also notable for its provisions to address quality of life issues. For years, little progress had been made with respect to increasing runway capacity at O'Hare because of concerns about noise in the communities around the airport. Before reaching his agreement with the Mayor, Governor Ryan held four public hearings around the region to listen to citizens concerned about these issues. In the end, the Mayor and Governor recognized that these communities have a stake in the future of the airport, and in their plan they committed additional funding for soundproofing schools and single-family homes around O'Hare. Chicago has already spent over \$130 million to soundproof 3,934 homes as part of the

most extensive airport noise abatement program in the country. In an era where airplane noise is decreasing significantly due to advanced aviation technology, the Civic Committee commends the Governor and Mayor for addressing these quality of life issues.

For a few years now, the aviation community at-large has been stressing the need to close the gap between demand and capacity in the national system with new runways and improved technology. That need still exists today, even though the aviation industry continues to recover from the economic slowdown brought about by the terrorist attacks. Indeed, the FAA, which last week released its commercial aviation forecasts, projected ever-stronger growth in air travel between 2004 and 2013 that will overwhelm the aviation system unless it is improved.

With this measure before you, Congress has an opportunity to take an important step to address this critical issue. The Civic Committee respectfully urges this Committee to approve S. 1786 – the National Aviation Capacity Expansion Act – and send it to the Senate floor for favorable consideration.