

**STATEMENT OF BILL CONNORS  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER  
NATIONAL BUSINESS TRAVEL ASSOCIATION  
BEFORE THE  
COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE SCIENCE  
AND TRANSPORTATION  
UNITED STATES SENATE  
February 9, 2006**

Thank you Mr. Chairman, Senator Inouye and Members of the Committee. I am Bill Connors, Executive Director and COO of the National Business Travel Association (NBTA). On behalf of our members, I appreciate the opportunity to participate in today's hearing regarding TSA's passenger prescreening programs – specifically Secure Flight and Registered Traveler.

The National Business Travel Association is the authoritative voice of the business travel community, representing more than 2,700 corporate travel managers and travel service providers who collectively manage and direct more than \$170 billion of expenditures, primarily for Fortune 1000 companies. Our members represent a broad cross-section of corporate America including millions of business travelers.

I want to first express the collective appreciation of the business travel community for your commitment to addressing the important issues of the Registered Traveler and Secure Flight programs and for including the perspective of the frequent business traveler in today's hearing. Our members share a common bond with many of the members of this Committee in that travel is an occupational necessity.

Each day, thousands of business travelers arrive at airports across the nation, ready to traverse the security checkpoints. Theirs is a perspective which differs significantly from other stakeholders in this process. Our nation's most frequent travelers have a unique view of the effectiveness and the deficiencies of our current security regime, and it is vitally important that this perspective be considered in the debate over new security programs.

Business travelers over the past four years have experienced significant constraints given the cascading security requirements set forth by the Congress and implemented by the Department of Homeland Security. Business travelers are among the most experienced visitors at our airports and certainly understand and appreciate the necessity for these security measures to ensure national security and the continued viability of commercial aviation.

NBTA supports the goals of the prescreening and physical screening regimes put in place in response to the 9/11 attacks. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, business travelers were among the first passengers in the sky, and are again traveling in record numbers, as aviation levels return and even surpassing record levels. Over the past four

years, one universal theme has been iterated by the vast majority of these travelers—we can and must establish more efficient and effective security measures by soliciting the cooperation of frequent travelers and utilizing available technologies to accomplish a less onerous and more effective level of safety and security.

## **REGISTERED TRAVELER**

The announcement by the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) regarding the national Registered Traveler plan was a welcome development for business travelers. RT pilot programs, such as the one undertaken at the Orlando International Airport, demonstrate that frequent travelers will embrace an opt-in system which provides a level of expediency and predictability to the screening process.

The RT initiative is a concept endorsed by the 9/11 Commission and Members of Congress as a way to enable security personnel to dedicate resources to more targeted risks. This concept is rooted in the belief that strong, effective travel security lessens unnecessary burdens on travelers. Registered Traveler is a demonstrable example that utilization of current technologies has the potential to provide the more than six million frequent business travelers with a more rapid, yet still secure screening process.

Affording passengers the opportunity to opt-in to the RT program provides a measure of predictability and reliability that corporate America has long sought. As companies seek to squeeze greater productivity gains out of their workforce, the ability of traveling employees to navigate through a web of security checkpoints in an efficient and reliable manner is critical in reducing time spent in the airport and increasing time spent conducting business.

Wait times at security checkpoints are anything but constant and current protocols dictate that passengers must arrive even earlier to ensure they are processed through security. Further, passengers traveling to different airports throughout the country have no ability to gauge wait times at each respective airport. While TSA has made measurable progress over the past year in addressing this issue, RT provides the promise that frequent business travelers will realize an increased level of measurability with respect to checkpoint wait times.

Much of the anecdotal evidence received from NBTA members participating in the Orlando International Airport pilot project indicates that RT participants indeed realized significantly reduced wait times. This was true even though the Orlando participants received the same security scrutiny (such as removal of shoes and coats) as did non-Registered Traveler participants. However, participants did benefit from access to a segregated security screening line. We fully expect that business travelers will derive even greater benefits when the full program is implemented and a complete slate of additional benefits is available to participants.

The success of the Orlando pilot project holds much promise for the potential of a national RT program, yet to ensure the fundamental success of the program, TSA must

continue to address certain fundamental issues. TSA must continue to provide assurances that privacy concerns will be addressed in the implementation of the national Registered Traveler program. In a joint survey conducted by NBTA and the Travel Industry of America, ninety-two percent of business travelers indicated a desire to participate in this program, and we expect that number to increase as the process becomes more transparent and TSA continues to offer assurances that passenger information privacy will be a primary tenet of the RT program. TSA's Registered Traveler archetype of a market-driven, private sector model must have informational safeguards governing the provision of personal information to third parties.

TSA has indicated that a core security assessment will be a requirement for each applicant seeking participation in the RT program, but more in-depth background checks using commercially available data may be undertaken by the private program providers. The trade-off for increased security scrutiny, as iterated by TSA, will be "a variety of enhanced or time-saving participant benefits at passenger screening checkpoints." As an opt-in system, RT applicants will have the final say in the information they seek to provide above and beyond the required TSA baseline information. Additionally, these enhanced security benefits could be derived through the deployment of additional security technology at RT checkpoints, such as Trace Detection equipment.

NBTA has joined many other stakeholders in this process in calling for a system of mandatory interoperability. Enrollees must be able to reap the benefits of participation at all airports engaging in the RT program. Corporate travel managers must be assured that private companies offering Registered Traveler cards will indeed work to develop a network where participants have universal access to RT privileges, regardless of the company providing the card. Additionally, interoperability will increase competition among companies offering RT cards, and as a consequence consumers will likely receive increased benefits at competitive costs. Stakeholder groups under the umbrella of the Voluntary Credentialing Industry Coalition (VCIC) have already initiated efforts to establish interoperability standards. These efforts signal a willingness on the part of industry to cooperatively engage with TSA in crafting a system that is viable and attractive to the business community.

Registered Traveler is a unique concept in the current security environment because it constitutes the first program dedicated exclusively to both traveler facilitation and focusing limited security resources in a threat based model. Significant progress has been made in outlining the RT program, and it will take the cooperative involvement of the aviation industry, government officials and travelers to ensure the system can continue to provide visceral benefits to participants.

## **SECURE FLIGHT**

NBTA supports the steps taken by Congress to ensure the viability of Secure Flight before it becomes operational. As we all know, the current system draws too many people into secondary screening. Many frequent travelers have witnessed grandparents, children, and even members of Congress unnecessarily selected for secondary screening.

Not only is this process frustrating to the traveler, but it draws important resources away from the screening process. The process reflects the need to move forward in crafting a more pensive, comprehensive, threat-based model of security screening

As TSA moves closer to launching Secure Flight, we urge careful consideration of several critical issues outlined in the March 2005 General Accountability Office (GAO) report to Congress. GAO described the progress that TSA has made in addressing the ten critical elements outlined by Congress, but GAO also appropriately recognized that additional progress is necessary leading up to the implementation of Secure Flight. Specifically issues of passenger redress as well as privacy concerns must be fully addressed in advance of the roll-out of this program.

It is difficult to discuss Secure Flight or passenger pre-screening issues without addressing the issue of passenger redress. Numerous business travelers have been ensnared on TSA's No Fly List or Selectee List, with little knowledge of how to navigate through the recourse process. These travelers then find out that they must complete the Passenger Identity Verification Form, mail the form to TSA, and wait for a finding. This antiquated system is time consuming and inefficient.

While the high profile cases of mistaken identity might provide amusing headlines, the hundreds of cases of mistaken identity involving less famous business travelers are just as serious. A recent survey conducted by NBTA found that over one-fourth of our member companies have over 5,000 business travelers per year. The frequency of business travel offers many chances for a case of mistaken identity and the disruptions that come with it. Many of our member companies struggle daily with watch lists issues that eventually are resolved, but the length of the process and the interim time spent waiting for resolution is costly to American businesses. An expedited process utilizing current technologies is not only possible, it's necessary.

Recently, Homeland Security Secretary Chertoff and Secretary of State Rice announced the Secure Borders and Open Doors initiative which included a proposal for "one stop" redress for travelers ensnared on the watch lists. This initiative promises a government-wide traveler screening redress process to resolve questions if travelers are incorrectly selected for prescreening. This is an extremely positive development, and NBTA fully supports the effort undertaken by both the Department of State and Department of Homeland Security to develop a system that utilizes current technologies to expedite passenger redress. As this system is being developed, TSA has indicated that it will continue to utilize its current Office of Redress to handle any watch list issues.

One of the fundamental problems of the current system is that most business travelers and their corporate travel managers are not aware of the procedures for redress. Even those travelers who are aware of their redress options find the current system exceedingly difficult to maneuver through. Many passengers have reported continued problems with repeated additional screening even after they have undergone all redress procedures and have been cleared by TSA. We urge that throughout the life of the current system and in advance of the implementation of the new passenger redress system, TSA

undertake efforts to educate the traveling population on the steps passengers can take to resolve the questions of selection for additional screening.

While the problems with passenger redress may appear to be an individual problem, it has a definitive and collective impact on corporate travel planning. Similarly, seemingly insignificant changes to informational requirements have had significant financial impacts on several corporations. Secure Flight will require passengers to provide additional personal information in advance of travel. While this may seem innocuous to individuals required to provide the information, it poses some concerns for corporate travel.

Seventy percent of corporate travel managers currently utilize corporate online booking tools to capture the information necessary to book travel for their corporate travelers. That number is expected to grow to ninety percent or more within two years. And while there is no institutional resistance to making these appropriate changes to accommodate passenger prescreening, changes in the fields of information required by TSA would impose a significant cost on companies and businesses utilizing online booking tools, as they would have to revamp the software to capture and send newly required data.

Additionally, it is possible that information required by Secure Flight could force companies to undertake the cost of revamping internal privacy policies, as many companies currently prohibit providing employee personal information, such as social security numbers and date of birth, to third parties. NBTA encourages TSA to work closely with the private sector to ensure that Secure Flight can work with current and future systems used for booking travel. Corporate travel managers have made several changes to travel booking software over the last four years, and will continue to work to ensure corporate compliance with new security regulations. Yet, federal officials must understand that small changes in informational requirements impose significant costs on corporate travel. From proposed CDC avian flu regulations seeking additional passenger information to Secure Flight informational requirements, costs on business could be significantly reduced if federal agencies would work in concert to determine what type and format of information will be required and impose those requirements at one time.

The Secure Borders and Open Doors program may provide a framework for meeting that goal. Among the initiatives outlined in the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of State announcement, was developing an advisory board that would help determine best practices related to travel policies. NBTA supports this concept as we believe that this forum provides an opportunity to present unique private sector views to federal officials in advance of significant rulemaking processes.

Ultimately Secure Flight will allow the U.S. government to focus more on the real threats and less on the millions of frequent travelers who are going about the nation's business. However, there is a need for a clear and stable regulatory framework to guarantee free movement of personal and corporate data while maintaining privacy, confidentiality and security. More importantly, this framework will help to ensure

consumer and corporate confidence in the exchange of information through the security screening process.

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the opportunity to testify today, and thank you and the Committee for your leadership in recognizing the critical impact of these issues on business travel.