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HEARING BEFORE THE UNITED STATES SENATE
COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE AND TRANSPORTATION
FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION OVERSIGHT OF AVIATION
MANUFACTURING
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Chair Cantwell, Ranking Member Cruz, and members of the committee thank you for the opportunity to be here with you today to discuss the agency's oversight of Boeing's production and manufacturing processes. But first, I want to thank the committee for your hard work in passing the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024. The FAA has already started implementation, and we will keep you and your staff updated on our progress.

Alaska Airlines Flight 1282

On January 5, shortly after departure, Alaska Airlines Flight 1282 experienced rapid depressurization after the left mid exit door plug blew out of a Boeing 737-9 MAX. The next day, on January 6, the FAA took immediate action and issued an emergency airworthiness directive grounding all 737-9 MAX airplanes with that particular door plug configuration.

We mandated and oversaw a thorough inspection and maintenance process on each of the grounded airplanes before allowing them to return to service. Our findings during those inspections showed that the quality system issues at Boeing were unacceptable and required further scrutiny. That is why we increased oversight activities including:

- Capping production expansion of new Boeing 737 MAX airplanes to ensure accountability and full compliance with required quality control procedures.
- Launching an investigation scrutinizing Boeing's compliance with manufacturing requirements.

- Enhancing oversight of the production of new airplanes with more FAA safety inspectors on-site at all Boeing manufacturing facilities.
- Increasing data monitoring to identify significant safety issues and mitigate risks early in the process.
- Launching an analysis of potential safety-focused reforms around quality control and delegation.

Boeing's Comprehensive Action Plan

This past February, I directed Boeing to develop a comprehensive action plan within 90 days to address its systemic quality control and production issues. During the subsequent months, the FAA worked closely with Boeing as it developed their roadmap and plan for the path forward. This plan was required to incorporate the results of the FAA's special audit as well as the findings and recommendations from the expert review panel report required by Section 103 of the Aircraft Certification, Safety, and Accountability Act of 2020 (ACSAA). Boeing provided its comprehensive plan to the FAA on May 30, 2024, marking the beginning of the next chapter of ensuring implementation and a renewed focus on safety at Boeing.

However, this plan does not mark the end of the FAA's increased oversight of Boeing and its suppliers. There must be a shift in the company's safety culture in order to holistically address its systemic quality assurance and production issues. Our goal is to make sure Boeing implements the necessary changes and has the right tools in place to sustain those changes in the long term. We anticipate that Boeing's roadmap will be part of an iterative process as it receives feedback and implement improvements to their design, manufacturing, and production processes.

Thanks to the ACSAA, and as reemphasized in the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024, Boeing is now required to have a mandatory Safety Management System, which will ensure a structured, repeatable, systematic approach to identifying hazards and managing risk. A robust Safety Management System is the foundation and structure of a safe manufacturing operation and will be a key factor in improving Boeing's safety culture.

Boeing has also committed to the following:

- Increasing and enhancing employee training, engagement, and communication;
- Encouraging their employees to speak up without fear of reprisal;
- Boosting supplier oversight;
- Increasing quality oversight at every step of the production process, and ensuring things happen in the right sequence and are approved before moving forward;
- Getting more input from users of the system;
- Simplifying production processes and procedures; and
- Bringing state-of-the-art technology to Boeing tool and parts management.

To monitor the health of Boeing's production and quality system, we also directed Boeing to identify key performance indicators (KPIs). These KPIs directly correspond to the targets outlined in their roadmap to improve their safety and quality systems and will help assess the effectiveness of their proposed initiatives. The KPIs provide real-time visibility into the production system with specific control limits that will trigger corrective action if needed.

FAA's Oversight Activities

Boeing must do their part and the FAA will continue to hold them accountable for producing and delivering safe aircraft. As part of the FAA's enhanced oversight of Boeing and its suppliers, we

have added more safety inspectors in the Boeing and Spirit AeroSystems facilities, and we will maintain our increased on-site presence for the foreseeable future. Our surveillance activities include:

- More engagement with company employees to hear directly from them and gauge the effectiveness of changes outlined in Boeing’s plan;
- Additional inspections at critical points of the production process; and
- Increased auditing of quality systems, build processes, and changes outlined in Boeing’s plan.

Our aviation safety inspectors will also monitor each of Boeing’s sub-teams tasked with implementing the key focus areas of the plan. The safety inspectors will provide direct feedback on Boeing’s proposed changes and will be able to validate the reported results of the KPIs. In addition to reviewing Boeing’s KPIs, the FAA will utilize its own metrics to monitor their production health and independently assess any early indicators of risks in the system.

The FAA is committed to continuously improving our oversight practices to ensure each design and manufacturing organization meets all regulatory requirements and produces safe and compliant products. Following the lessons learned from January 5th, the FAA changed its oversight approach and those changes are permanent. We have now supplemented our audits with more active, in-person oversight—the “audit plus inspection” approach, which allows the FAA to have much better visibility into operations at all OEMs, including Boeing.

Continuous Safety Improvement

Recent events, especially the incident involving the Boeing 737-9 MAX, have shown us we cannot become complacent when it comes to maintaining safety and public confidence in the

nation's aviation system. Aviation safety is a collaborative effort, and we must all work together to ensure we continue to maintain and build on the agency's safety record. We must all continuously improve and reexamine our processes and procedures that support our shared safety mission by collecting, sharing, and using data to detect risks, simulate outcomes, and optimize our decision-making to ensure the safety of the flying public.

Maintaining the safest aviation system in the world requires rigorous oversight over the entire aviation system, including ourselves – ranging from our own workforce to pilots, air carriers, manufacturers, and airport operators. Since being confirmed as Administrator, I have committed to looking internally within the FAA and improve our own processes and procedures. We already have taken a number of actions over the last several months to strengthen our safety culture and mitigate risk in the system.

From an oversight perspective, the FAA has multiple monitoring tools that we are actively leveraging across different parts of the agency. For example, the risk index utilized as part of our assessment of an air carrier's operations has been an effective tool in identifying emerging safety trends before they become significant risks in the system. This data-driven process recently led us to conduct more rigorous oversight and an in-depth examination of an air carrier following an indication of an increase in the level of risk in their operations.

We are working to bring similar types of monitoring principles across the board to the entire aviation system. We can apply these types of principles to evaluate risk, regulatory capture, and other safety concerns to how we oversee manufacturers, air carriers, airport operators, air traffic controllers, pilots, and other aviation users. As we leverage different tools and best practices internally and externally, we will continue to look for ways to improve and refine our safety oversight activities at the FAA.

In closing, let me stress: the agency's number one priority is safety. The FAA will always take appropriate action to protect the flying public – whether that action is against a manufacturer, toward an airline, or enhancing oversight of our own operations. As we carry out our regulatory responsibilities and oversight activities, safety will always inform our decision-making.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have.