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**Before the Subcommittee on Security
Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
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**“Improving Security at America’s Airports: Stakeholder Perspectives”
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Chairman Sullivan, Ranking Member Markey, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for your continued leadership on aviation security and for inviting me to this important hearing. My name is Chris McLaughlin, and I am the Chief Operating Officer of Denver International Airport (DEN). Security is a critical focus for airport operators, and I look forward to sharing an airport perspective on the continued importance of enhancing aviation security.

I would also like to thank Senator Gardner, who serves on the full committee, for continuing to be a great champion for Colorado and Denver’s airport. His leadership in fostering innovation and driving forward-looking security solutions at our nation’s airports has resulted in increased efficiency and security for the traveling public.

I am particularly grateful to testify in today’s hearing because aviation and airport security has been a career-long passion of mine. Over the past twenty years, I have worked in nearly every sector of our industry. I worked for two airlines where I ran ground operations at both the hub and system level; for the TSA, where I served as the Federal Security Director for Colorado, and here in D.C. as the assistant administrator for security operations. In that role, I oversaw all ~450 U.S. airports. I also played a leadership role in the development and deployment of TSA’s PreCheck program. Prior to joining the airport, I served in executive roles for two disruptive technology companies, helping them to gain traction during the early phases of their growth in commercial aviation security.

This morning, I would like to focus my remarks on the importance of continued innovation in aviation security, with specific regard to a few key areas: the need to modernize our security infrastructure and the acquisition challenges associated with doing so, continued focus on important programs like TSA PreCheck, the implementation of REAL ID, and advancements in biometric technology. I know these issues are important to the Subcommittee, and I would like to convey how important they are to airports as well.

Innovation in aviation security is critical for three main reasons. First and foremost, we must stay ahead of an adaptive and committed adversary. Second, we must keep up with ever increasing passenger volumes – from infrastructure to operations. And third, airports must maintain the autonomy to differentiate ourselves according to our unique customer needs and preferences.





As threats to aviation have evolved, Denver has proactively responded to the changing landscape, making a point to partner with Department of Homeland Security agencies and airlines on innovations that enhance security. Perhaps most publicly, we have embarked on a project to overhaul our main terminal in a manner that strengthens our public area security posture without compromising its iconic nature. Largely in response to attacks in pre-security areas like Brussels and Istanbul, and domestic incidents like those at Fort Lauderdale and LAX, Denver is repositioning our checkpoints in a manner that more quickly disperses and insulates our passengers.

From the beginning of our planning process, we have worked diligently with TSA to explore potential innovations that allow TSA officers to focus on security at the checkpoint – rather than crowd control.

- We partnered with TSA in 2017 to pilot a palm-print biometric authentication technology.
- We were among the first airports in the nation to install Automated Screening Lanes, and because of the positive results we have seen, we are planning our next phase of installations now.
- We are among the first group of airports selected for TSA's CT program and will soon be installing six lanes at DEN.
- Last but not least - having served as the Federal Security Director for TSA when AIT was first deployed a decade ago - I am grateful that last fall DEN became the first airport in the nation to install a new generation of body scanning technology that is more natural, less invasive, and faster than traditional systems.

While our primary objective in this project has been to improve security, we have remained keenly aware of our growth in passenger traffic as well. Currently the 5th busiest airport in the country and 20th in the world, Denver is experiencing exponential growth. We eclipsed 60 million passengers served in 2017, and just two years later, we will serve nearly 70 million travelers this year.

Each of the technologies that I mentioned gets us closer to meeting our passenger demand. In addition to these, it is critical that TSA continue to advance its risk-based security initiatives. TSA PreCheck has succeeded in its goal of enhancing security and improving the screening process for individuals enrolled in the program. However, the low overall enrollment rate has prevented TSA from achieving its ultimate goal of improving security and processing time for all passengers. TSA must continue to advance the PreCheck program and it is my belief that the best way to do this is through the third-party initiatives specified in the TSA Modernization Act.

Recognizing that robust identity authentication and verification is a critical component of risk-based security, DEN supports the upcoming implementation of REAL ID and we are committed to doing our part to ensure the traveling public is well informed and prepared before they get to the checkpoint. Similarly, we believe that the *voluntary* use of biometrics improves the passenger experience for some while strengthening security for all. We support guardrails to protect the privacy of the traveling public. Still, based on existing aviation programs and consumer trends in other areas, it is likely that a growing number of passengers will voluntarily submit their biometrics in order to expedite their security screening process. By verifying these passengers' identity faster, officers have more time to verify remaining passengers using traditional means.





While it may not be clear that “individualism” is something that should be considered at a hearing on security, our identity is something that we take very seriously at DEN. We are proud to have been recognized as the top U.S. airport by Skytrax and The Wall Street Journal this past year. Yet, at least for The Journal, we achieved this ranking despite finishing 17th out of the top 20 airports for our overall security experience. This score is not a reflection on the hard work or customer focus of our TSA partners. Rather it reflects checkpoints that need to be expanded, re-imagined, and modernized. As I said earlier, we are doing our part, and TSA is working with us.

We appreciate TSA’s effort in developing its gifting policy and for issuing an approved list of automated screening lane vendors this year. And we applaud the deliberate work the agency has undertaken to test new technology and ensure our security remains the highest priority. That said, it feels like the process should be easier, and frankly, less expensive for airports.

We are making substantial financial investments in order to deliver a checkpoint with modern technology. DEN is buying the equipment, paying for its installation, paying to remove and store existing equipment, and – under the new gifting program – funding a four-year maintenance plan. After which, we will be “allowed” to give the equipment to TSA. We are not alone in this. Other local jurisdictions as well as airlines are making similar investments. We’re not doing this because we believe we should. We’re doing it because our customers can’t afford for us to wait.

There is growing concern across the industry that the aviation community’s willingness to lend a hand after long TSA lines created a perceived crisis in the summer 2016, is drifting into an expectation that local jurisdictions will finance the federal security system.

Two years ago, our CEO Kim Day came before this committee and offered two ideas Congress could authorize to address the funding needed to modernize security and keep pace with the exceptional growth in air travel:

First, Congress could discontinue the practice of diverting the 9/11 security fee revenues to non-security purposes. In fiscal year 2019 alone, \$1.4 billion of the fees air travelers paid for security were diverted away. In fact, billions of dollars that could have gone to testing innovative technology and recapitalizing checkpoints have instead gone to pay down unrelated government activities since the Balanced Budget Agreement of 2013 was signed. And, billions of future resources will similarly be diverted unless Congress addresses this situation.

The second is the Passenger Facility Charge, or PFC. Even a modest increase in the PFC on originating and destination passengers would give airports the flexibility to prioritize security efforts to match the growth we are seeing.

Both ideas remain valid today.

I am grateful for the opportunity to testify in front of the subcommittee today. I am confident that with your leadership - and the work of our stakeholders represented here at this witness table - that we can capitalize on real opportunities to make travel safer and more efficient.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

