

**HOLD UNTIL RELEASED BY THE
SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE ON
AVIATION OPERATIONS, SAFETY AND SECURITY**

TESTIMONY OF

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**BEFORE THE UNITED STATES SENATE
COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE AND TRANSPORTATION
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
AVIATION OPERATIONS, SAFETY AND SECURITY**

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THE UAS EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Mr David Ahern

**Director, Portfolio Systems Acquisition
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(Acquisition, Technology and Logistics)**

Senator Dorgan, Senator Conrad, Congressman Pomeroy, and distinguished guests: thank you for the opportunity to update you and the people of North Dakota on the progress of the UAS Executive Committee's efforts to advance the integration of Unmanned Aircraft Systems into national airspace.

As you are aware, Section 1036 of the 2009 Duncan-Hunter National Defense Authorization Act, the U.S. Congress recommended that the DoD and the FAA form an Executive Committee (ExCom) to act as a focal point for resolution of issues on matters of policy and procedures relating to UAS access to the National Airspace System (NAS). The sense of Congress was that progress has been lagging in the integration of UAS into the NAS for operational training, operational support to the Combatant Commanders, and support to domestic authorities in emergencies and natural disasters. Additionally, the NDAA language suggested that techniques and procedures should be rapidly developed to temporarily permit the safe operation of public UAS within the NAS until more permanent solutions can be developed or identified.

The UAS Executive Committee (ExCom)

In response to the 2009 NDAA language, the Deputy Secretary of Defense and the Deputy Secretary of Transportation agreed to form a multi-agency executive committee to:

1. Act as a focal point for the resolution of pertinent UAS issues between the DoD and the FAA; and
2. Identify solutions to the range of technical, procedural, and policy concerns arising in the integration of UAS into the NAS.

In addition, the Deputy Secretaries agreed to expand the membership of the Executive Committee to include the Department of Homeland Security and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, which after DoD, represent the two largest stakeholders in Federal UAS operations.

Membership in the ExCom consists of two representatives each from the Department of Defense and the Federal Aviation Administration, and one representative each from the Department of Homeland Security and NASA. DoD representation consists of the executives from the two major organizations charged with oversight of UAS issues: The DoD Policy Board on Federal Aviation, represented by Acting Executive Director Steven Pennington, and the OUSD UAS Task Force, which I chair.

The first meeting of the ExCom was in October of last year, and we have continued to meet approximately bi-monthly since. One of our first tasks was to create a Charter to outline how we are organized and how we would coordinate our efforts and report on progress. I'm pleased to report that Charter has been finalized and is currently

being signed by the Deputy Secretaries of the three departments, as well as the NASA Administrator. Contained in that Charter are the four key goals of the ExCom:

Goal 1. Coordinate and align efforts among key Federal Government agencies (FAA, DoD, DHS, and NASA) to ultimately achieve routine safe federal public UAS operations in the National Airspace System.

Goal 2. Coordinate and prioritize technical, procedural, regulatory, and policy solutions needed to deliver incremental capabilities.

Goal 3. Develop a plan to accommodate the larger stakeholder community, at the appropriate time.

Goal 4. Resolve conflicts among Federal Government agencies (FAA, DoD, DHS, and NASA), related to the above goals.

With our goals identified, we of course have not waited on Charter signature to begin work. At our very first meeting, we stood up a Senior Steering Group to manage the activities of the ExCom, primarily through the establishment of Working Groups that are chartered to tackle specific issues that relate to increased NAS access for Federal public UAS. To date, two Working Groups have been established: The first Working Group is tasked to improve the FAA's Certificate of Authorization (CoA) process that authorized UAS flight in national airspace; and the second Working Group is charged with creating a National Airspace Access Plan for Federal public UAS.

While there is significant work being done to both optimize the CoA process, and to minimize the operational restrictions that encumber UAS operations conducted under

CoAs, you asked specifically for an update on the National Airspace Access Plan. I will thus focus the remainder of my statement on that plan.

The ExCom NAS Access Plan

The NAS Access Working Group was initiated by the ExCom SSG in December of 2009, and first met in late February of this year. Since then, they have worked to develop a process by which the ExCom member agencies will first identify and prioritize their access requirements; and subsequently how the NAS Access Working Group will analyze those requirements to determine viability and applicability of potential approaches to address them. That process has been captured in a joint NAS Access Plan that is designed to address the requirements laid out by Congress in Section 935 of the 2010 NDAA. That Plan is tasked to the Secretaries of Defense and Transportation, and was tasked to include:

1. A description of how the DoD and FAA will work together to expand NAS access for UAS;
2. Milestones for expanded access, and a Transition Plan for DoD UAS sites programmed for 2010-2015;
3. Policy recommendations for UAS access policies, standards, and procedures; and
4. The resources required to execute the above.

Task 1 was addressed through the creation of the ExCom, as reported to Congress in April of this year. The remaining tasks were designed to be captured in the NAS Access Plan, or the separate Department of Defense Transition Plan. Both of these documents will be finalized and submitted to Congress in October of this year.

The NAS Access Plan is a joint document, submitted to Congress by the Department of Defense on behalf of the Departments of Defense and Transportation. The Plan was reviewed and coordinated with the Department of Homeland Security. As previously mentioned, the NAS Access Plan is largely process-focused, providing a “roadmap” of how the ExCom member agencies will work together to identify and address common NAS access requirements for Federal Public UAS. The Plan also contains joint recommendations from member agencies for specific policy, regulatory, procedural, and technological approaches to addressing the increasing needs for access on a permanent basis.

The NAS Access Plan also includes a recommendation from the Department of Defense to establish a broad-based framework that categorizes groups of airspace needs into potential solution sets. This framework is currently being adopted by the DoD, and forms the basis for the Department’s own Airspace Integration Plan.

Partnered with the NAS Access Plan is the DoD Site Transition Plan, which describes the Department of Defense’s intended implementation of NAS access approaches at bases that have existing or programmed UAS activities between now and 2015. Also based on the DoD’s common airspace integration framework, the Site Transition Plan identifies the required level of capability, the planned approach, and the intended implementation of UAS NAS access at over a hundred locations across the US. The Site Transition Plan is currently being coordinated with the Services for validation of locations, priorities and timelines, and we expect to have it finalized in early October.

It is important to note that the schedule contained in the DoD Site Transition Plan is greatly dependent upon the rapid approval and adoption of policies, regulations, procedures, and technology to meet the NAS access requirements identified by the ExCom member agencies. Without rapid progress on NAS Access Plan initiatives, the milestones contained in the Site Transition Plan entail significant schedule risk.

Conclusion

In closing Mr. Chairman, I'm pleased to report steady progress in the advancement of NAS access for Federal public UAS. The establishment of the ExCom, and subsequent work by its Senior Steering Group and associated Working Groups, has already borne fruit in greatly improved relationships and communication at the appropriate levels of each member Department or agency. We have seen measurable improvement in many existing UAS access process, and look forward to upcoming reductions in some of the operational restrictions placed on UAS today. The creation of the NAS Access Plan, and accompanying DoD Site Transition Plan, represents a significant milestone in inter-agency cooperation. While we recognize that there is much work to be done, the outlook for improvement in routine NAS access has never been brighter.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Committee. I would be happy to answer any questions you and the Members of the Committee may have.