



Nicholas E. Calio  
President and CEO

June 24, 2022

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

As a follow-up to our recent conversation about planning to ensure that airline operations continue to be safe and reliable over the July 4<sup>th</sup> travel weekend, I wanted to reiterate and emphasize our members' commitments to doing everything within their power to deliver a safe and on-time product not only over the holiday weekend but throughout the entire summer. Specifically, U.S. air carriers have aggressively implemented several initiatives to drive better operational reliability:

- Pulled down 15 percent of summer (June-August) flights relative to what they had planned for at the outset of 2022;
- Accelerated robust hiring and training programs in all areas, including flight crew, customer service agents and airport staff in addition to increasing pay for many positions; and
- Given more flexibility for itinerary changes and increased IT investments in airline apps to increase communication with travelers and to allow passengers to rebook without queuing.

The industry is actively and nimbly doing everything possible to create a positive customer experience since it is in an airline's inherent interest to keep customers happy, so they return for future business.

However, not every air traffic variable is within an airline's control. For instance, one of our A4A member carriers estimate that air traffic control (ATC) related issues were a factor in at least one-third of recent cancellations. In many instances the weather requires the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to institute Ground Delay Programs (GDP) or other traffic management initiatives that slow the ATC system for many hours. However, we have also observed that FAA ATC staffing challenges have led to traffic restrictions under blue sky conditions.

**We appreciate the FAA's acknowledgement of controller staffing challenges and would like to request a meeting to discuss how we can work together to better understand FAA's controller staffing plan for the upcoming July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend and summer travel season.** Some of the issues we would like to discuss include:

- **FAA Staffing:** Ensuring adequate qualified staffing at key FAA facilities like Jacksonville Center (JAX) and the New York TRACON (N90) is imperative. JAX has been

understaffed for 27 of the last 30 days, which is crippling to the entire east coast traffic flows. We are willing to advocate for more qualified controller staffing as agreed was needed at the May 3<sup>rd</sup> Florida summit with A4A, NATCA and FAA; we want to confirm that the FAA is still committed to that needed increase in staff.

- **FAA Staffing Plan:** The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has shared its staffing plan for the July 4<sup>th</sup> travel period with us. As a government partner, it would be helpful for the FAA to share its staffing plan with airlines so we can plan accordingly.
- **Special Activity Airspace Management:** It would benefit stakeholders to discuss, develop and establish a real-time, dynamic scheduling and management tool of special activity airspace used by the Department of Defense (DoD) to optimize the use of the national airspace system for all stakeholders and better utilize military airspace.
- **Airspace Closures:** Reduction of airspace closures due to commercial space launches and more optimal scheduling of such events to avoid high-volume air traffic times could also alleviate some pressure on the system.
- **Unscheduled Operations:** Developing an appropriate policy regarding unscheduled operations would help guide planning efforts for industry and government alike.

Our nation's air traffic controllers have done exemplary work during the pandemic in managing traffic safely and efficiently. We want to make certain that they have all the resources and tools needed to be successful. They will be a critical and necessary voice at any meeting.

We appreciate your recognition that, as the air traffic service provider in the U.S., the federal government has an obligation to work transparently with industry so that capacity can meet demand. All sectors of the economy and the federal government are facing post-pandemic challenges, making it more important that we work closely to address these challenges and ensure that our nation's aviation system remains safe and reliable for both passengers and cargo.

Sincerely,



Nicholas E. Calio

cc: Billy Nolen, Acting Administrator, Federal Aviation Administration