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May 21, 2025

Subject: An Open Letter to Congress from U.S. Airline CEOs

Dear Members of Congress,

As Americans prepare for Memorial Day weekend getaways and look toward the busy summer travel season, and amid an increased reliance on daily cargo shipments, we are writing to ask Congress to take bold action and rebuild America's aging air traffic control (ATC) system.

Earlier this month, Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy announced a comprehensive plan for the federal government to make meaningful investments in our national airspace. His plan received strong support from the Modern Skies Coalition, a broad coalition comprised of more than 50 aviation organizations which emphasized the "dire necessity to address antiquated technology and the staffing shortage."

Now, it's time for Congress to do its part and provide much-needed resources and turn the plan into reality. Here's why:

We must build on our safety record: Aviation remains the safest mode of transportation in the U.S., but for it to remain so, serious upgrades need to happen now. In 2023, the FAA's Safety Review Team found that the air traffic controller shortage and inefficient operations are "eroding the margins of safety." This is unacceptable. U.S. airlines, our pilots, flight attendants, technicians and ground employees will never compromise on safety. Congress must do the same.

Upgrading to a new system is a prudent use of taxpayer dollars: Right now, it's more expensive to continue supporting the technology and equipment from the 1980s than it is to buy a new ATC system. Ninety-two percent of the FAA's Facilities and Equipment budget goes toward the maintenance of these outdated systems. As the Secretary himself has said, it's like continuing to pour money into an old clunker of a car—at some point, it makes more financial sense to buy a new car. We're past that point.

The current system is failing Americans: From the January 2023 NOTAM failure to recent outages causing disruptions at Newark, Americans are feeling the impact beyond delayed and cancelled flights. Our airlines are having to fly fewer flights in busy areas like the New York City airspace to accommodate the air traffic controller shortage. This means fewer flight choices for consumers. Understandably, the FAA slows down and spaces out the number of flights in congested airspace to maintain an incredible high-level of safety—however that negatively impacts efficiency, on-time performance and the customer experience.

The FAA's current technology is wildly out of date: Air traffic controllers should not be operating with corroded copper wiring, floppy disks and physical strips of paper with flight numbers. Improving technology is critical to recruiting the air traffic controllers of the future. Our controllers are doing an amazing job under stressful working conditions. They do not need the added stress of potential technology failures. Aviation is an industry of innovation, and the FAA needs the ability to procure 21st century equipment and transformational technology solutions to efficiently and strategically handle 21st century flight volumes.

Aviation connects the country and the world: Our economy depends on a strong aviation system. Every day, U.S. airlines operate 27,000 flights carrying 2.7 million travelers and 61,000 tons of cargo while supporting 10 million U.S. jobs. We're proud of this work and don't want government inaction to hinder growth, airlines' competitiveness or Americans' confidence in our airspace.

We thank President Trump and Secretary Duffy for their acute attention to this issue, and we are deeply appreciative of House Transportation and Infrastructure Chairman Sam Graves for including $12.5 billion in the reconciliation bill to help build a new state-of-the-art ATC system—a solid down payment that will help keep air travel safe and efficient for Americans who fly and ship goods every day. We are grateful to the House Budget Committee for advancing the legislation, and we look forward to working with policymakers to keep it moving forward.

The United States needs and deserves a world-class aviation system. Let's get this done!

Sincerely,

Ben Minicucci
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Alaska Air Group

Robert Isom
CEO
American Airlines Group &
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Michael Steen
CEO
Atlas Air Worldwide

Ed Bastian
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