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Select Committee on  
Energy Independence and Global Warming  
U.S. House of Representatives

August 14, 2007

Ms. Marion C. Blakey  
Administrator  
Federal Aviation Administration  
800 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Administrator Blakey:

As you know, the aviation industry's contribution to the problem of global warming has grown as on-ground and in-air operations expand. While emissions from aviation currently account for only three percent of the greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming pollution that percentage is expected to rise significantly as a result of a projected three-fold increase in aviation over the next 20 years.

In this regard, I am concerned about reports that the Next Generation Air Transportation System (NextGen), the inter-agency body tasked with the job of anticipating the future needs of our air transport system, has yet to make aviation's contribution to global warming a major priority. NextGen was formed in 2003 to coordinate agencies and leverage new technologies to make airports "safe, scalable to growing demand, and responsive to evolving business models". Although NextGen includes an environmental working group and released an integrated plan in a 2004 report to Congress on aviation and the environment, an examination of its work to date suggests that it has yet to incorporate a serious examination of how global warming could significantly alter current assumptions about the growth path of the aviation industry.

A 2006 progress report on NextGen discusses local air quality emissions but there is no mention of climate change. In addition, while the Joint Planning and Development Office examines what needs to be done to reduce levels of aviation noise and local air quality emissions to reduce environmental concerns as a constraint on capacity, it is unclear whether addressing climate change is part of this effort.


Meanwhile, other countries are noting emerging scientific concerns about the dangers of climate change and are acting to curtail it. Most significantly, the European Union has proposed including aviation in the European Union Emissions Trading Scheme, which would require American airlines operating in Europe to follow carbon emission caps as early as 2012.

In light of your chairmanship of NextGen, the Committee would appreciate receiving responses to the following questions about the status of global climate change as a topic of consideration by NextGen:

1. What is NextGen's position on the current and anticipated impact of aviation on global warming?
2. How many tons of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are emitted on a yearly basis in the United States from aviation? Please differentiate between emissions in-air and on-ground within an airport.
3. What strategies is NextGen considering to address emissions both in-air and on-ground within an airport?
4. What is the status of NextGen's studies to develop a national roadmap on the viability of alternative fuels for aviation?

Thank you in advance for your time and attention to this matter. Please respond to this request as soon as possible, and no later than September 4, 2007. Should you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Ms. Danielle Baussan of the Select Committee staff at 225-4012. Thank you.

Sincerely,

  
Edward J. Markey  
Chairman