

THE AIRPORT
and
ITS NEIGHBORS

*The Report of the President's
Airport Commission*



Washington • May 16, 1952

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Presidential Directive

THE WHITE HOUSE

FEBRUARY 20, 1952.

DEAR JIM: For some time now, I have been seriously concerned about airplane accidents, both commercial and military, that have occurred in the take-off and landing of aircraft, especially in heavily populated areas. I have been concerned about the loss of life and I have been concerned about the anxiety in some of our cities. I have decided to set up a temporary President's Airport Commission to look into the problem of airport location and use. I am delighted that you are willing to serve as Chairman of the Commission, and I hereby appoint you as such. Mr. Charles F. Horne, the Administrator of Civil Aeronautics, and Dr. Jerome C. Hunsaker, Head, Department of Aeronautical Engineering, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, will serve with you on the Commission.

The present location of many of our major airports was determined a number of years ago when the aviation industry was new and operations were relatively limited. Also some of the locations reflected special military requirements. Since that time both civil and military air traffic have been growing rapidly, and simultaneously our cities have been continuously spreading out toward these airports.

Meanwhile, there has been great progress in the art of flying and in the development of supporting facilities. Striking advances have been made in aircraft and power plant development, in speed and service, in operational control of aircraft and in their ability to operate under a wide variety of weather condi-

tions. A common system of navigation and landing aids, for both civilian and military use, has been installed and is being maintained by the Federal Government on the Federal airways and at important airports. At the same time, the Nation's investment in both civil and military airports has undergone tremendous expansion.

Our present mobilization efforts have greatly speeded up the tempo of these activities, particularly in the design and production of aircraft and the construction of facilities for the military services.

In view of these developments, I feel that the Nation's policy on airport location and use should be restudied. We need a study that is both objective and realistic. That is what I want your Commission to do. In undertaking this survey, several major considerations should be kept in mind. On the one hand, provision must be made for the safety, welfare and peace of mind of the people living in close proximity to airports. On the other hand, recognition must be given both to the requirements of national defense and to the importance of a progressive and efficient aviation industry in our national economy.

In addition to these general considerations, I would like the Commission to take the following specific matters into account.

1. The Federal, State, and local investment in existing civil and military airports and the factors affecting the utility of airports to adjacent communities.
2. Actions by Federal, State and local authorities to lessen the hazards surrounding existing civil and military airports.
3. Assignment of newly-activated military units to existing airports, with particular regard for potential hazards to the communities involved.
4. Site selection for new civil and military airports and the factors affecting relocation of existing airports.
5. Joint civil and military use of existing or new airports.

6. Legislation and appropriations necessary to carrying out appropriate policy.

Because of the urgency of the problem, I hope you will be able to give me your final recommendations within ninety days. In your work, you will have the full cooperation of all the Executive agencies whose functions and interests relate to your assignment. And you will want, of course, to keep in close touch with other groups concerned about this problem, including the Committees of Congress, local authorities and the aviation industry.

Arrangements will be made to meet the expenses of your Commission out of the Emergency Fund for the President.

Sincerely yours,

HARRY S. TRUMAN

MR. JAMES H. DOOLITTLE,
Vice President,
Shell Union Oil Corp.,
New York, New York.

mission believes both airlines and airplane builders should extend such "human fail-safe" measures wherever possible.

The designer has still another obligation. For the benefit of the crew, he must reduce the complexity of the modern aircraft and its associated equipment. Literally hundreds of instruments, switches and knobs have replaced the relatively simple control mechanisms in airplane cockpits of a few years ago. Unfortunately, human capability has not increased as rapidly as mechanical complexity. A design objective should be the maximum use of "fail-safe" automatic devices which will relieve the crew of routine responsibility for many aircraft functions.

Crew Selection

The crew of a present-day airplane is selected with great care and subjected to stringent medical examinations. This is particularly true of the pilot who is both airplane captain and the man at the controls. His two most important qualifications are professional competence and judgment. Lack of either characteristic in a pilot could lead to serious difficulty.

Professional competence in a transport pilot is a definable combination of many things: knowledge of the airplane itself; highly developed flying ability; good coordination; excellent eyesight, good hearing, and generally good health. Judgment, on the other hand, is an intangible. A pilot acquires judgment in direct ratio to his experience. All things being equal, the older the pilot the better his judgment. This build-up continues for many years. Ultimately, however, a point will be reached where age slows a pilot's reflexes and begins to offset his accumulated experience and judgment.

Because the airline industry is young, few pilots have yet reached the point of diminishing capabilities. In the next decade, however, airlines will have to give serious consideration to the proper utilization of older pilots. At the point where a pilot's experience no longer compensates for his reduced physical capability, airline captains should graduate to a recognized senior

status, be assigned to other duty, or retire. As an example, some might be put in command of the largest and fastest transports on routes requiring the most experience and judgment. In this case a fully qualified first pilot or reserve captain should handle the controls.

At present, airline pilots are required to undergo semiannual physical examinations. Specifications are set by the CAB and CAA, but the examinations given by most major airlines are actually more searching than regulations require. While this system is somewhat less severe than that of the military services, it has proved adequate until now. The Commission feels, however, that it should be stiffened in the future because of the pilot age problem. A thorough study of pilot aging and allied problems should be sponsored by the Aero-medical Association.

Inspection

The Civil Air Regulations, in general, provide a sound basis for the safe and efficient supervision of civil aviation. CAA inspectors are constantly checking airline operators, personnel and equipment for compliance with the rules. All airlines are required to give their pilots periodic checks in compliance with the Civil Air Regulations, but the CAA is now able to participate in only a part of these checks. Thus, day to day inspections and checks must be largely left up to private industry. Industry has discharged this obligation conscientiously and effectively in most cases but the CAA should have a more direct knowledge of the condition of the crews and equipment in the commercial air transport industry than is now possible. It is believed that the number of CAA inspectors should be raised.

The increasing speed of aircraft, coupled with the steady expansion of air traffic, puts an ever-increasing premium on instrument-flying proficiency. Most airlines and the military have in the past put great emphasis on training in instrument techniques but the Commission feels that an enlarged instrument flight training program is desirable. Pilot checks, to be more effective, should be given in simulated weather and traffic conditions.

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