

THE NATIONAL AIRPORT SYSTEM

INTRODUCTION

This Nation has the finest, safest, most efficient and most widely used airports in the world. This network of over 9,900 public and private airports, comprising the national airport system, has contributed greatly to the unprecedented era of prosperity enjoyed in this country during the past 25 years. It has provided to American business and the traveling public a freedom and ease of movement unknown in the history of man. The national airport system plays a vital part in the defense and security of the country and is utilized extensively by the military.

Anyone who has traveled by air during the past year recognizes, however, that there are serious problems of congestion at many of our Nation's airports which could impede the present and future growth of air transportation and restrict the Nation's mobility to an intolerable extent. The present airport congestion problem is overshadowed by far by the threat of virtual strangulation of these vital arteries of transportation based on the predicted growth in air traffic and the radical changes in aircraft technology that are certain to occur in the next 10 years.

The Federal Government has played an important role in the development of the existing national airport system by providing grants-in-aid under the Federal Airport Act, initially enacted in 1946. Current authorization for grants-in-aid under this act will expire at the end of fiscal year 1970. Serious doubt has arisen since the last extension of the Federal Airport Act about its effectiveness in light of today's traffic and technology and the financial capacity of State and local governments to provide the financial resources for the development of new airports and the improvement of existing airports during the next 10 years. The most recent congressional appropriations for airport development, which have been less than the amount authorized, presage congressional disapproval of appropriations out of the General Treasury for airport development.

To consider the extent and severity of present airport problems and to determine the magnitude of future development needs arising from the tremendous predicted increase in traffic and change in aircraft technology, the subcommittee held 4 days of hearings beginning August 28, 1967. Representatives from all segments of aviation—the users, the operators, the traveling public—and the leading Federal officials responsible for air transportation, the Secretary of Transportation, the Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration, and the Chairman of the Civil Aeronautics Board, testified before the subcommittee. The purpose of this interim report is to present to the full committee a summary of the views of the various aviation interests, a