

The subcommittee will explore this aspect of the current airport congestion problem at its subsequent hearings and will welcome further testimony from those persons that would be affected by the various solutions proposed. There can and must be achieved a better utilization of the existing airport system even though it may require a break with past traditions or philosophies about the free and unlimited access to airports. The cost of an airport development program based on free and unlimited access to all airports by all segments of aviation would far exceed the price that State, local, and Federal Governments can or will pay. Better utilization of existing airports and construction of separate and equal general aviation airports at substantially smaller cost is a more reasonable and desirable course.

Commercial aviation

A major portion of the runways and, particularly, the terminal area congestion at large and medium hub airports results from the scheduling practices of the commercial airlines. The airlines bunch their flights in the early morning and late afternoon hours and thus bring upon themselves much of the congestion that occurs. Passengers prefer to depart and arrive during these periods of the day which accounts for most of the flights being scheduled at those times. But when the cost of constructing new airport facilities to meet peak-hour requirements reaches the magnitude mentioned previously in this report, there are valid reasons for setting limits upon passenger convenience.

Current airline schedules at major hub airports border on the absurd. In many airports there are as many as 10 or 15 scheduled departures all leaving at the same time and as many arrivals scheduled for the same minute of the day. These practices result in an under-utilization of existing airports. If planning for new airports is based on achieving maximum peak-hour capacity, then money is wasted because the facilities are not used sufficiently during other times of the day. A balance must be struck between the convenience of passengers and the massive cost to State, local, and Federal Governments to provide terminal area facilities adequate to cope with the sudden surges of traffic at peak hours.

The Secretary of Transportation in discussing this aspect of the airport problem offered the following comments:

I do not think the possibilities of spreading out the schedules of the scheduled air carriers have been given enough attention. Perhaps we could move some of the peak-time flights to other times. I believe that it is very possible by now that the average air passenger will be quite ready to consider a flight at an odd hour if he can avoid the aggravation of trying to move during the conventional hours. There are incentives that might be offered which help to influence his choice. Cheaper air fares for off-hour travel, for example. Airport operators might try offering incentives to both air carriers and general aviation to use airports less at peak hours, by raising airport charges for services provided during peak hours, and lowering them during the off-hours.

Measures such as these can be initiated by the local airport authorities or the airlines. The airlines should effect voluntary changes in scheduling practices to alleviate the congestion that occurs during peak hours.