Future Airport Development

To prevent future airport congestion that could impede not only the growth of air transportation, but restrict the growth of the national economy itself, planning and construction must begin immediately for new airports and for the improvement and expansion of existing airports. No existing airport is equipped to handle the deluge of passengers that will debark from the Boeing 747 in early 1970 or from a commercial version of the C5–A in the mid-1970's if that aircraft should be developed.

Ten years from now more than 1 million passengers a day will be boarding the commercial airlines of the United States. The number of general aviation aircraft will almost have doubled. These two statistics alone justify the conclusion that substantial airport development, both commercial and general aviation, must occur.

Although the State and local communities will continue to provide the major share of funds for airport development, there is a definite Federal responsibility to assist State and local governments in this massive development activity.

Financing the national airport system

The subcommittee has reached some tentative conclusions concerning ways to finance future development of the national airport system:

1. An airport trust fund, similar in nature and operation to the successful highway trust fund, must be established to provide adequate and certain funding for airport development.
2. User fees must be imposed on commercial aviation and general aviation to raise funds adequate to finance the Federal share of anticipated airport development cost.

Because aviation is no longer a fledgling industry in need of Government protection to nurture its growth and because of more urgent demands on the Federal dollar, it is no longer feasible to fund the grants-in-aid program under the Federal Airport Act by appropriations from the General Treasury. Even if this method were continued, the amount of appropriations that would in all probability be allocated to the program would fall far short of the sums needed. The history of appropriations under the Federal Airport Act during this decade is persuasive evidence of this.

Trust fund financing of airport development would provide a reasonably certain amount each year and an amount adequate to meet the Federal share of airport development costs. Although the construction of the Interstate Highway System out of the highway trust fund has not proceeded exactly as planned, great progress has been made, which otherwise would not have been made under any other form of financing. Trust fund financing would enable the airport operators, who must construct the airports, and the airlines, who operate into them, to plan their capital investments with greater care and prudence. From the Federal Government standpoint its share of airport development costs would no longer be a direct drain on the Treasury or on the general taxpayer, who does not receive any special benefit from the national airport system. The principle that the user should pay for special benefits or facilities made available to him is a sound one, especially in