

Presently the total cost of acquisition, maintenance, and the operation of the national airways system is borne by the Federal Government. The Federal Aviation Administration is given an annual appropriation to cover this cost. The 5-percent ticket tax imposed on airline passengers and the fuel tax imposed on general aviation fuel is intended to offset to some extent the cost to the FAA of operating this system.

The subcommittee hopes to determine in the subsequent hearings the cost associated with improving and modernizing the national airways system, both in terms of capital expenditures and the cost of annual maintenance and operation. In order to expedite the modernization of the national airways system, the subcommittee believes that the capital acquisition cost should also be financed out of a trust fund such as that envisaged for airport development. Priority should be given to the acquisition and installation of facilities such as airport control towers, instrument landing systems, airport surveillance radars, and approach lighting. This would increase significantly the safety and the utilization of the hundreds of air carrier airports coming into the jet age which do not have these navigational and safety aids.

TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS

1. The Federal Government has a responsibility to assist State and local governments in the planning, construction, development, and improvement of the Nation's airports. This should take the form of financial assistance to the communities. The national airport system must include not only adequate airports to serve the commercial airlines and their passengers, but adequate and separate airports and runways for general aviation aircraft in metropolitan areas where congestion is a serious problem. These general aviation airports must have the same operational capabilities for all-weather flying as exist at air carrier airports.

2. The Federal share of airport development costs should come from revenues generated by the imposition of user fees on commercial aviation and general aviation of the type and nature discussed in this report. Some contribution should be made from general tax funds for military use of civil airports.

3. An airport trust fund should be established into which the revenues derived from the user fees would be deposited. The funds would be used to provide Federal assistance for a program similar to the existing Federal grants-in-aid program under the Federal Airport Act. The amount of the Federal contribution should be at least 50 percent of the cost of eligible projects. The financing of terminal area development must be investigated further. Consideration should be given to the feasibility of direct or guaranteed loans as a supplement to any grants-in-aid program established and funded out of an airport trust fund.

4. Steps should be taken immediately by local airport authorities and Federal regulatory agencies to alleviate the congestion that exists today at major metropolitan airports caused by extensive general aviation use and peak-hour scheduling practices of the commercial airlines. To a great degree airport congestion occurs because of underutilization of existing facilities.