

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

September 9, 2015

The Honorable Bill Shuster, Chairman
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
2165 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Peter DeFazio, Ranking Member
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
2165 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Shuster and Ranking Member DeFazio:

I write to you today to bring to your attention a problem affecting many of our small, rural airports. As you know, in January of 2014, new regulations went into effect for airlines regarding pilot hours of training as well as pilot hours of rest. These new regulations require the number of hours in training needed for a co-pilot to increase from 250 to 1,500; furthermore, the hours of rest regulations now require pilots to have 30 consecutive hours of rest each week, a 25 percent increase over previous requirements.

These rules, while maybe unintended, have led to a barrage of flight cancellations across the country, but especially in our more rural communities, as airlines have struggled to find pilots who meet the new qualifications. In one Third District community, Scottsbluff, Nebraska, enplanements fell from 10,356 in CY12 – before the new regulations were announced – to just 5,594 in CY14. In North Platte, Nebraska, enplanements fell from 11,210 to just 5,016 over the same period of time.

Cancelled flights also threaten funding for small airports through the Airport Improvement Program (AIP) which helps pay for projects to improve infrastructure, including runways, taxiways, noise control, navigational aids, safety, and security. To qualify for maximum program funds, airports must reach 10,000 enplanements per year. Many rural airports which previously qualified for the program, such as Scottsbluff, North Platte, and Kearney, Nebraska were unable to once again reach this target because of cancelled flights.

Because of the importance of this issue, I have introduced H.R. 853 – The Small Airport Regulation Relief Act of 2015. This bill would require the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to use enplanement numbers from 2012 – before the regulations

took effect - when calculating appropriate annual funds for airports for AIP for the next two years. Similar language was included in the last FAA Reauthorization for airports hit hard by the financial crisis of 2008 and I ask this language once again be included in the next FAA Reauthorization for the airports hit hard by these new regulations.

For rural America, access to commercial air service is more than a convenience; it helps connect us to the rest of the nation and encourages economic growth. I look forward to working with you as we continue to look for ways to improve airline safety while also preventing any disproportionate impact on rural communities, or as I fear, an eventual pilot shortage. I very much appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Adrian Smith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Adrian" and last name "Smith" clearly distinguishable.

ADRIAN SMITH
Member of Congress

AMS/mb