

**TESTIMONY**

**Statement of  
Michael La Pier, A.A.E.  
Executive Director,  
Central Illinois Regional Airport**

**Before the  
Committee on Governmental Affairs  
and the  
Subcommittee on Oversight  
Of  
Government Management**

**September 25, 2001**

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee and staff. I would like to thank the Chair for the opportunity to appear here this afternoon and to provide you with a small airports view of the current state of aviation security in our country.

I would like to thank the senior Senator from the State of Illinois, Senator Durbin, for inviting me to appear today and especially for his unyielding support and leadership of aviation issues in the State of Illinois.

I should tell you this is my first opportunity to testify before a congressional or senate committee. I am deeply honored by this experience and will always value it as an American.

In the words of a song made popular again recently, "in a New York minute, everything can change." This is eerily true of the world of civil aviation as the result of the tragic actions of September 11<sup>th</sup>. The acts of aviation piracy and subsequent terrorism have clearly changed the face of the industry that the Central Illinois Regional Airport is a part of forever. We recognize that change, Mr. Chairman, and frankly, we welcome it. We clearly don't welcome these changes in the manner in which they were presented to us, but we support fully all efforts to strengthen civil aviation security in our country.

Allow me for a moment to introduce you to the Central Illinois Regional Airport. Serving a region of about 1.2 million people from Bloomington – Normal, the airport has seen unprecedented growth in passenger traffic and scheduled commercial flights. Since 1987 passenger traffic has grown from just over 80,000 passengers annually to nearly 500,000 in calendar year 2000. At the same time, the number of scheduled daily airline flights has grown from 12 in 1987 to nearly 50 in 2000. In fact, the number of air carriers serving the airport has grown from two (2) in 1987 to its current level of five (5). This growth is the direct result of a very robust economy in the region coupled with the offering of expanded service opportunities by the airlines. I guess you could call us a true success of the deregulation era.

In terms of passenger traffic, we were recognized as the fastest –growing non-hub airport in the United States in 1997 and over the last five (5) years, the second – fastest growing airport regardless of size in the country.

Prior to the horror of September 11<sup>th</sup>, the Central Illinois Regional Airport stood in full compliance with all applicable security directives and regulations put forward by the Federal Aviation Administration. I am also pleased to report that we achieved compliance with all new directives issued after September 11<sup>th</sup> within twenty – four hours, making us one of the first in the Great Lakes region to achieve this status. We take security very seriously at Central Illinois Regional Airport.

It is important to note, however, that full compliance does not come without a cost. Our security budget for this year totals about \$125,000.00. The increased security dictated after September 11<sup>th</sup> will cost approximately \$30,000.00 per month or nearly triple our budget. This expenditure, if annualized would constitute nearly 20% of our \$2.1 million annual operating budget. This, Mr. Chairman, has the potential to become a significant financial burden.

As the members of this committee are aware, there are today two distinct but intertwined areas of responsibility for aviation security at our nations airports. First, airlines are tasked with a variety of regulations regarding passenger and baggage security under the rules of Federal Aviation Regulation Part 108. These tasks include what is perhaps the most visible security mission, the passenger security checkpoint. Airlines hold the responsibility for providing trained, qualified personnel to man this operation. Currently, in most if not all situations, carriers contract these services with one of several private companies.

Airport operators support the passenger security checkpoint with law enforcement officers. These officers are not trained to operate the checkpoint but are in place to support its operators if necessary. The level of law enforcement support required varies depending upon the size or activity level of the facility. In the case of Central Illinois Regional Airport, the required level of law enforcement support is achieved through a series of alarms that alert City of Bloomington Police who will then respond to the checkpoint within five (5) minutes.

I do not wish to be viewed as critical of the current system of checkpoint security. I believe that the vast majority of companies and individuals involved in these activities are trained, and caring people that have done and are doing a good job of protecting the safety of our airline passengers. It is important to note however that these individuals are not law enforcement personnel.

I believe that whether we like it or not, the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> have caused a change in the rules of the game. I do not believe these changes can be met with simple regulatory adjustments. We must meet these changes with significant actions that will allow us to again capture firm control of the safety of our nations skies.

There has been a great deal of discussion and debate recently about the need to standardize or perhaps even federalize the activities of all airport checkpoints. This is an idea that has significant merit and in my view warrants a very complete examination. Perhaps it is time for us to move our checkpoint security out of a regulatory posture and into a posture of law enforcement. A parallel I believe can be found in our nations' Coast Guard. While I do not feel qualified to recommend what agency should be tasked with this new effort, I would suggest that they be provided timely access to all relevant information gathered by all branches of our government so that they can rapidly and effectively adjust their training and if necessary their posture. We must demand that they take a proactive approach rather than a reactive one. Simply put, the rules of the game have changed and I believe we can expect those rules to continue to change in

the future. Whoever is tasked with the responsibility of checkpoint security must have all necessary information and tools, particularly communication tools, to anticipate pending changes before they occur.

The second area of responsibility for aviation security is that of airport security. This, in simple terms is the security of the airport facility and the environment that our air carriers operate in. These activities are the responsibility of the airport operator.

Under current regulations, the extent of airport security required varies depending upon the activity level of the airport. The level required varies from complete video monitoring and law enforcement patrols at our nations busiest airports to much less stringent, but nonetheless effective, security posture at some of our smaller airports.

When I think back to the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> and in particular the events of that day at Central Illinois Regional Airport, the one thing that stands out in my mind was the lack of information and direction that we received. I fully realize that the efforts of those in charge were probably correctly focused on much more high profile, higher activity airport facilities but while the exposure is higher at those facilities it is no less real at airports the size of Central Illinois Regional.

Going back to the Gulf War, airports and the Federal Aviation Administration working together crafted plans to implement as needed varying levels of security depending upon the perceived threat. Without going into specific details, all airports developed under the guidance of FAA, four levels of security that airports are prepared to implement in short order when notified by FAA. This action I would call reactive at the time but one that should have put us in a proactive stance for the future.

Unfortunately, the one component that failed in this system on September 11<sup>th</sup> was again communication. We did not receive any communication from FAA regarding increased levels of security until the next day.

I again do not wish to be viewed as being critical of the individuals that were involved in these activities at FAA. I believe they do a wonderful job of regulating the security posture of our nations airports. We must however learn from these events and practice that old saying "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

I believe the agency in charge of aviation security must be provided with the tools necessary to communicate with all partners in aviation security promptly and thoroughly. If all of the partners are not on the same page at the same time, the system is bound to fail.

It will likely become a part of the discussion in the next few weeks that the security posture of our airport operators needs to be improved as well. I would caution here that "one size does not fit all" in this discussion. However, if airports are required to vastly increase their security posture, they must be provided with the resources to do so.

It is important to note one distinction here between airlines and airports. Airlines are intended to be for profit enterprises. Particularly at this time in our economy, we hope that they are in fact for profit.

Airport operators, on the other hand, are with few if any exceptions, not for profit, government agencies. Particularly in the case of smaller airports,

operators are typically supported by some form of property or ad valorem tax revenues. In our case, the Central Illinois Regional Airport is approximately 38% tax dependent.

As recently as September 20<sup>th</sup>, the financial markets recognized the gravity of the situation surrounding commercial air transportation and elected to place all North American airports on “credit watch.” This action will have significant impact on all airports that have bonding authority and will severely hamper our ability to raise capital. Further, Standard and Poor’s has made the statement that in their view “airports and airlines are inextricably linked. Airports are suffering from the same problems as airlines---increased costs due to security.....and dramatically reduced revenues.” In their statement, Standard and Poor’s calls on Congress to grant FAA “immediate and broad authority to reimburse airports for extraordinary costs for security to maintain financial viability.”

I would ask that this committee seriously consider this action but also consider providing for the resources necessary so that airport operators can improve our overall security posture. We looked at Central Illinois Regional Airport to determine what resources it would take to improve our posture. If we were to match the security levels in place at larger airports, our quick analysis of need would call for an investment of nearly \$1.8 million in one - time expenses with ongoing investment of nearly \$500,000.00 annually. That Mr. Chairman is a tough pill for a small airport to swallow without some help.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to address you here this afternoon. Not only do I thank you personally but professionally as well. Often small airports are overlooked in discussions of this nature. Our needs and abilities are different than our larger brothers and sisters. It is comforting to know that in this case, we have had the opportunity to share them with you.

[Committee Members](#) | [Subcommittees](#) | [Hearings](#) | [Key Legislation](#) | [Jurisdiction](#)  
[Press Statements](#) | [Current Issues](#) | [Video of Select Hearings](#) | [Sites of Interest](#)