

Marianne McInerney

Executive Director

National Business Travel Association

**Before the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs; and
The Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management,
Restructuring and the District of Columbia**

November 14, 2001

Good morning. My name is Marianne McInerney and I am the Executive Director of the National Business Travel Association (NBTA). NBTA represents over 1,500 corporate travel managers for the Fortune 1000 companies, who are in charge of over 70% of the \$190 billion dollars spent annually on business travel expenditures domestically.

Before I begin my remarks, let me thank the Committee and the Subcommittee for the invitation to represent the business travel community and consumers on this pertinent and timely issue.

NBTA represents corporate travel managers and their companies that operate throughout the world. They and our colleagues throughout the world account for about 50% of the \$396 billion that is spent annually on business travel worldwide and send over 44 million travelers through our nations' air transportation system. In fact, a majority of the airlines' revenue comes from a small fraction of customers – frequent business travelers – who average 20 to 30 flights per year and pay full fare.

By now, we all know that the terrorist attacks of September 11th have created tremendous unease among the traveling public. Travelers lost confidence in our nation's skies as well as our nation's airports. In response to this uncertainty, immediately after the tragedy many businesses dramatically curtailed, and in some instances, temporarily ceased employee travel.

In an effort to accurately and timely represent all business travelers worldwide, we at NBTA worked diligently to stay in close contact with the corporate travel managers. Throughout the weeks following

the tragedy, we urged them to communicate their evolving corporate policies, their travelers' concerns and comments. We asked them for their suggestions, in turn relaying them to Congress, the Department of Transportation, the FAA and the Homeland Security Office. Over and over, we got the same response from travelers: "improve security." Improvement and standardization of security measurements was the single most important factor in getting people to resume travel and restoring confidence in our aviation system. When asked to rate the importance of various factors in getting business travelers to schedule a trip, 71% of corporate travel managers rated federalizing the security process as extremely important.

We are now just past the two-month mark since the tragedy. Members of the Committee and Subcommittee, our members are still frustrated. There is no consistency among airports and airlines even today under the new, stringent rules. Frequent travelers are noticing that protocol for check-in and security checkpoint procedures vary from one airport to another. Even the procedures within a certain airport, at a certain checkpoint may not be the same today as they were yesterday. I, myself, am a witness to that. Two weeks ago, at Reagan National Airport, I was asked for an ID to compare to my boarding pass in order to go beyond the checkpoint and every third passenger underwent a random check. Last week at the very same airport, I was no longer asked for any identification, my computer was not checked despite the fact that ten screening personnel stood close by.

As one travel manager put it recently "I think at this point it's just the luck of the draw." The same manager reported a 20 minute check-in procedure at the Los Angeles International Airport, but a 2 hour experience at Chicago O'Hare.

Another member cited her traveler's experience. While the check-in

procedure and security checks at Dulles airport were extremely stringent and time-consuming, on her return flight from Portland International airport, she observed a relaxed security staff and no time delays due to random security checks.

A business traveler from Office Depot traveling from Reagan National got randomly wanded three times while sitting at the gate waiting to board a flight. She also observed alertness and immediate attention to bags that were more than 5 feet away from their owner. She observed flight attendants and pilots passing through very strict security requirements before entering the aircraft. While these precautions seemed impressive at the time, that same passenger noted that since that incident she has seen security in airports vary from strict to very relaxed and leisurely. She's seen scrutiny over proper identification, but she's also been able to pass through with no identification requirement.

At some airports, identification is not even required of some travelers as they pass through checkpoints, while personal items are confiscated from others. Similarly, while some airlines are adopting the process of matching checked-in luggage to the names of passengers on board, it is not a uniformly practiced policy. Similar stories go on and on.

My point today is a simple and concise one. NBTA, our members, and frequent flyers across the board are not seeing the necessary consistency in airport security since September 11th. It seems that on TV, in the newspapers, and on the House floor the traveling public is being constantly reassured that tighter airport security is necessary. However, as we've been reminded by countless examples of inconsistency and failure to follow procedure, such a vast nationwide task simply cannot be coordinated in a decentralized effort.

Central to the issue of returning traveler confidence are an

individual's perceptions of risk and their behavior in light of those perceptions. By virtue of their frequent travel experience, business travelers get the proverbial birds-eye-view on the nation's aviation security approach and implementation. Often, the business traveler is the one who visits multiple cities each day and experiences varying degrees of security.

Going forward, in the near term, consumer confidence and real security improvements should be the focus of business and governmental efforts. NBTA and its membership feel that the only way to truly accomplish this massive goal is to federalize the airport screening process; implement new technology, like screening machines, to check all luggage; and institute a voluntary travel card to provide frequent travelers with seamless movements through the screening process.

But most importantly, we need to act swiftly. Passenger traffic is now down 28%, and security is still not under control. Imagine what it will be like when most of those passengers return. Over 400,000 additional passengers per day will be moving through our aviation system, and we will not have the systems in place to deal with them adequately and still ensure safety.

Finally, security improvements must be made swiftly in order to prevent further economic declines in the travel and tourism industry, and in the economy as a whole. The impacts of serious declines in travel are far-reaching. Travel industry net loss for 2002 is predicted to be \$2.4 billion dollars. And losses to the GDP are projected at close to ten times that much. And with each security breach, traveler confidence is diminished, and the economic outlook for the industry gets worse.

Finally, our nation's aviation security is now a matter of national security, and we need to keep that thought first and foremost.

Aviation security needs the same uniformity, professionalism and standards that are administered to other systems that impact our national security. Therefore NBTA urges Congress to enact the following measures:

Federalization of airport security screeners and baggage handlers and imposition of uniform security procedures among airports and airlines.

- Background checks of all airport workers, including ramp attendants and foodservice employees.
- The imposition of a single standard that defines the maximum size of carry-on baggage.
- An increase in the percentage of checked baggage that is screened.
- Computerized screening of passengers.
- Passenger prescreening to be expanded for domestic passengers as well as international passengers.
- Positive passenger baggage match expanded to all flights.
- A mandate on the use of, and increase in the number of federal marshals on domestic flights.
- Trained and certified personnel to perform searches of aircraft cabins.

Thank you for the time and effort you are devoting to this important issue, and thank you all for your attention here today.

Note: NBTA is currently updating traveler experiences in an overnight survey and will update the reported travelers' experiences on Monday before 5:30 p.m.