



Issue Overview, Feb. 05, 2024

Congressional Update

[Senate Eyes FAA Reauthorization Bill Markup](#)

State and Local Updates

[Rocky Mountain Airport Sued](#)

Regional Representative Update

[By Josh Rousseau, HAI Northeastern US Regional Representative](#)

Congressional Update

Senate Eyes FAA Reauthorization Bill Markup

Summary of Facts

Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-Ill.), chair of the Aviation Subcommittee, announced that **the Senate Commerce, Transportation, and Science Committee is scheduled to meet this week for the markup of the long-awaited FAA reauthorization bill (S.1939)**. However, uncertainty remains about the markup timing and the ability of Congress to meet the Mar. 8 FAA reauthorization extension deadline. Other senators have cautioned that pending issues could potentially delay the anticipated timing.

The Senate Commerce Committee has been grappling with disagreements over pilot training hours, retirement age, and flight restrictions at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (KDCA). The committee postponed its original markup last year because of disagreements over an amendment related to pilot training hours.

Congress passed a stopgap extension of the FAA's authority in December. If the Senate moves the bill forward, it will need to reconcile differences with the House of Representatives, which passed its version of the FAA reauthorization bill, H.R.3935, in July.

HAI Position and Actions

HAI continues to urge the Senate to take swift action on S.1939. The passage of the FAA reauthorization bill is crucial in ensuring stability and continuity for the general aviation industry. Approval of a final bill is essential to provide all stakeholders in the aviation community with the certainty needed to plan and operate effectively.

We stand ready to support efforts that promote the long-term stability and growth of vertical aviation.

State and Local Updates

Rocky Mountain Airport Sued

Summary of Facts

A long-standing dispute over aircraft noise at Rocky Mountain Metropolitan Airport (KBJC) in Broomfield, Colorado, has escalated to legal action. More than 400 homeowners in the nearby Rock Creek subdivision of Superior have filed a lawsuit seeking unspecified damages against Jefferson County, the airport's owner and operator. The lawsuit cites a significant increase in flight operations, which it claims has resulted in greater exposure of residents to lead fuel and caused property values to decrease. Residents are calling for changes in flight paths and a switch to unleaded fuel to safeguard property values.

The airport, in operation since 1960, is currently ranked third busiest in Colorado. Despite the airport's noise abatement program, aimed at minimizing aircraft sound and mitigating negative impacts, challenges persist. The Colorado Aviation Business Association (CABA) and the airport collaborate with businesses to align flight patterns with less-populated areas. CABA notes, however, that "industry can only move flight plans over unpopulated areas to a certain extent, because flight paths are regulated by the FAA and have a nationwide impact."

The airport also announced plans in October 2023 to accelerate its transition to unleaded fuel ahead of the FAA's mandate of 2030, stating it had already begun switching to UL94 unleaded aviation gasoline.

While the airport has adjusted flight paths within FAA guidelines and is transitioning to unleaded fuel, residents are still not content. To facilitate communication, the airport has established monthly community roundtable meetings, allowing neighbors to express their concerns. These meetings occur on the first Thursday of every month, at 6:00 pm.

HAI Position and Actions

HAI emphasizes the importance of finding a collaborative solution that addresses the needs of the community while considering the requirements of operators at KBJC. We recognize the concerns raised by residents in the Rock Creek subdivision and we support open communication between the community and the aviation industry at KBJC.

We encourage rotorcraft operators to engage with HAI and provide input on their concerns, experiences, and potential solutions by contacting katia.veraza@rotor.org. By fostering a collaborative dialogue, we aim to find mutually beneficial resolutions that uphold the interests of both the community and our industry.

Regional Representative Update

By Josh Rousseau, HAI Northeastern US Regional Representative

In 2024, HAI anticipates a dynamic year of growth in which we address both challenges and opportunities facing our members and industry partners. We are committed to enhancing support for our members and the industry.

I extend a special thank-you to everyone I had the privilege of meeting with on Jan. 10 in Boston, Massachusetts. Amid a hectic day, we engaged in productive discussions about our priorities and the collaborative efforts planned for 2024.

I began my day meeting with Rick Kenin, chief operating officer of transport at Boston MedFlight, an HAI member. Their impressive operation, marked by effective communication and coordination of services with competitors, sets a noteworthy standard, serving as a model for other regions.

Subsequently, I met with Russ Arena, executive director of the Massachusetts Business Aviation Association (MBAA), and Garry Melia, aviation safety manager at HAI member MassMutual and an MBAA board member, to delve into regional issues. Topics included Hanscom Field (KBED) hangars, coordination with trade groups, legislative strategy in the Massachusetts legislature, and the forthcoming Aviation Caucus Day.

In the spirit of collaboration, I had discussions over lunch about advanced air mobility (AAM) and green infrastructure with Jeff DeCarlo, aeronautics administrator and AAM integration program lead at the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, and Fred Bedard, chief of AAM initiatives at MassAutonomy. Subjects included electric aircraft-charging hubs, airport electrification (with heavy involvement from HAI member Beta Technologies), and ongoing efforts to introduce sustainable aviation fuel into the commonwealth. Excitement resonates as these discussions continue in government and quasi-government spaces, with HAI's presence welcomed at the table to ensure the vertical aviation industry's voice is heard.

At the end of the day, I visited Westfield-Barnes Regional Airport (KBAF), where I met with airport manager Chris Willenborg, the newly appointed president of the Massachusetts Airport Management Association. Our discussion covered AAM, airport investment, and the potential for HAI's increased involvement to support our shared interests.

Engaging with our members yields valuable feedback and enhances our ability to assist them across all aspects of their operations. I eagerly anticipate connecting with more members throughout the year. Please contact me at josh.rousseau@rotor.org with your concerns.

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