Testimony of Captain Jody Reven
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U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
Hearing on
Air Traffic Control System Modernization
June 4, 2025

Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Larsen and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify and share the perspective of the more than 11,000 commercial airline pilots of the Southwest Airlines Pilots Association. My name is Jody Reven, and I am a current 737 Captain at Southwest Airlines and President of SWAPA.

SWAPA is one the largest independent pilot unions in the world and is the sole bargaining unit for the professional pilots of Southwest Airlines. SWAPA has been dedicated to aviation safety and security since 1978. We are grateful to offer our perspective on the 2024 FAA Reauthorization and air traffic systems, personnel, and aviation safety.

The pilots of Southwest Airlines are heartbroken by the tragedy at Reagan National Airport (DCA) in January. We share our deepest condolences with the families of the passengers and crew of American Airlines 5342 and PAT 25. We are committed to working with this committee, Congress and all aviation stakeholders to ensure a similar tragedy never happens again.

Safety and operational excellence are not guaranteed, and our system relies on industry-wide collaboration. SWAPA is proud to be a leader in safety data collection and analysis, risk identification, and mitigation. Southwest pilots are among the most productive in the world, operating over 4,000 flights each day to 120 domestic and international airports. SWAPA partners with the FAA, aviation labor, airlines, and the industry with one goal: to keep the National Airspace System the safest and most efficient in the world. The 1.5 million passengers that SWAPA pilots carry each year depend on it.

SWAPA supports immediate actions to implement the 2024 FAA Reauthorization and make long-overdue technological upgrades, increase air traffic controller staffing, and equip FAA to recapitalize its systems and processes to meet the demands of increasingly complex airspace.

The pilots of Southwest Airlines are industry leaders in incorporating technology that increases situational awareness and provides tools to help pilots and controllers make safe decisions. Unfortunately, the system's potential is not fully realized.

To maintain and enhance the safety and efficiency of the National Airspace System (NAS), we must make technological and infrastructure improvements now. This includes ongoing development of advanced automation tools, improved airport infrastructure, and modernized gate-to-gate operations that reduce delays and improve passenger flow. The evolving landscape of air travel – which includes commercial carriers, unmanned aerial systems (UAS), urban air mobility, and space flight – demands a NAS that can accommodate greater complexity safely and efficiently.

SWAPA has partnered with the FAA, aviation labor, and industry to advance air traffic modernization and recapitalization efforts. Key components of advanced technology – performance-based navigation, data communication, and Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast (ADS-B) – enhance pilot and controller decision-making and situational awareness. However, not all aircraft are equipped to fully

utilize these technologies. A significant percentage of participating aircraft lack the navigation capabilities required to benefit from new procedures, forcing controllers and pilots to use inefficient workarounds. Standardized equipage across the fleet is essential for the NAS to achieve its full potential.

Advanced navigation procedures, which improve efficiency and reduce noise and emissions, cannot become standard unless a greater portion of participating aircraft are properly equipped. Attempting to compensate with increased pilot workload undermines the intended safety and efficiency benefits. Moreover, there is no substitute for two fully trained, qualified and rested pilots on the flight deck. Automation should support pilots, not replace them. FAA studies confirm that roughly 20% of normal flights experience anomalies requiring human intervention, reinforcing the need for pilot redundancy.

Communication, Navigation, Surveillance/Air Traffic Management (CNS/ATM) integration is another critical area that FAA must accelerate. Enhanced communication, navigation, and surveillance systems increase situational awareness, reduce carbon emissions, support fuel savings, and reduce flight times. Tools like ADS-B, Airport Surface Detection Equipment, Model X (ASDE-X), and Airport Surface Surveillance Capability (ASSC) improve runway safety, yet these systems are not available at all airports. SWAPA urges the FAA to rapidly deploy surface safety systems at all airports with airline operations. We are encouraged by the Surface Awareness Initiative (SAI), which is now expanding to more airports.

Unfortunately, a large percentage of FAA's current equipment and communications systems are outdated and not up to the task of handling the current airspace system, let alone future demands. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) recently conducted an operational risk assessment of FAA's Air Traffic Organization (ATO). It found "that of FAA's 138 systems, 51 (37 percent) were unsustainable and 54 (39 percent) were potentially unsustainable." FAA must move faster to address these concerns.

SWAPA pilots operate at some of the most complex, mixed-use airports in the United States. Mixed-use airports have additional risk factors that must be considered. Airports that serve primarily air transport aircraft only do a good job with traffic flows, deconfliction and procedures. High density airports that serve air transport, light civil aircraft, business jets and helicopters are at the highest risk of another midair collision. The tragedy at Reagan National Airport must not be repeated, and SWAPA urges FAA to conduct an immediate safety assessment at Hollywood Burbank (BUR), Long Beach (LGB), and Orange County-John Wayne (SNA) airports to ensure processes and deconfliction procedures are adequate.

Terminal automation enhancements, such as Approach Runway Verification (ARV), improve alignment accuracy for arriving aircraft. We also commend efforts to install automation displays to boost controller situational awareness where radar coverage is limited.

We also support space-based ADS-B as a critical supplement to the ground network, offering real-time aircraft tracking over oceanic airspace. This will improve safety by eliminating delays in locating aircraft in emergencies and enhance surveillance where traditional ground infrastructure is not viable.

Data Comm, which allows digital messaging between pilots and controllers, reduces miscommunication and increases efficiency. However, implementation has been uneven. FAA should continue efforts to roll out Data Comm and ensure max participation of all aircraft.

Future NAS demands include real-time data exchange and improved integration of space launch operations. The FAA must also develop a robust Unmanned Traffic Management (UTM) system to manage growing low-altitude drone traffic. All aircraft-including rotorcraft and advanced air mobility

systems-must be equipped with technology that gives ATC and other pilots critical situational awareness to help mitigate risks.

Recent high-profile incidents highlight that ATC facilities are inadequately equipped and staffed, and reinforce the fact that safety depends on experienced and well-rested pilots and controllers. These incidents, including at Chicago's Midway Airport where two Southwest Pilots recognized and safely avoided a hazardous runway incursion, reinforce that we must have a minimum of two pilots on the flight deck to ensure added awareness, expertise, and experience. There is no technological solution that can overcome the risks introduced by reducing the flight deck compliment. Flight deck and ATC technology are support tools and never a replacement for highly experienced, rested and fully trained pilots and controllers.

SWAPA thanks this committee and FAA for their commitment to increasing transparency and efficiency in the FAA's Office of Aerospace Medicine. Expanding the number of Aerospace Medical Examiners (AME) and reducing the processing times for aeromedical certificates are essential steps to maintaining a strong pipeline of well-trained and experienced pilots. Increasing transparency, improving pilot and AME education, and reducing wait-times for medical certifications is critical. FAA has an opportunity to revolutionize the aeromedical process, and we encourage the creation of an Airman's Medical Portal where digital, secure delivery of required documents by both pilots and AMEs could increase efficiency for both pilots and the regulator.

Finally, despite congressional authorization for multiyear modernization projects, FAA budget projections often fall short, particularly in facilities and equipment funding. This underestimation, paired with frequent budget disruptions, hampers effective planning and implementation. While Congress has supported FAA funding through annual appropriations and reauthorization, budget shortfalls, funding disruptions and continuing resolutions have hampered progress. A stable, multi-year funding strategy is critical to maintaining our leadership in global aviation safety.

FAA must also provide realistic funding requests that recapitalize systems instead of maintaining legacy systems that are decades old in some cases. FAA must be accountable for meeting goals and implementation deadlines of the 2024 FAA Reauthorization.

SWAPA thanks this committee for the five-year bipartisan FAA reauthorization bill that expedites the hiring of Air Traffic Controllers, strengthens the aviation workforce while protecting experience requirements, and accelerates the development and deployment of advanced technologies including new surface safety technology and runway and taxiway signage and lighting systems. We appreciate the Committee's leadership in addressing near-miss incidents, enhancing runway safety, and advancing critical technologies. Notable improvements include the sustained operation of ASDE-X systems, and support for the Runway Safety Council and discretionary grant programs.

SWAPA fully supports the Administration's budget which funds the FAA's Technology and Facilities account at $4 billion. The system urgently needs sustained, robust budget requests and an immediate infusion of funding. SWAPA also applauds Chairman Graves' critical first step in moving forward on $12.5 billion of funding.

We applaud the administration and this body for making our nation's air traffic control system a priority, and we look forward to working with the Administration and Congress to make this a reality. The pilots of Southwest Airlines are committed to continuing our work with the Committee, FAA, and industry partners to preserve and improve the safety of our national airspace. Thank you for the opportunity to

testify and for your continued focus on aviation safety and implementation of the 2024 FAA Reauthorization.