

Wayports Concept Regains Life As Solution To Congestion

The term "wayports," mentioned in the late 1980s by politicians and others as a way to ease future airport congestion, appears to be gaining renewed momentum now that congestion is an everyday reality. However, wayports are not on the agenda of tomorrow's Aviation Gridlock Series in Washington sponsored by FAA and the National Academy of Sciences. The concept was endorsed by several FAA administrators and Majority Leader Trent Lott and by Sen. John McCain, among others. Among this number was Bob Holt, campaign finance manager for former President George Bush, who helped dedicate the Midland, Texas, airport as a "wayport to the world."

The wayport endorsement crosses party lines. Sen. Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.), a member of the Commerce Committee, told the American Association of Airport Executive-Airports Council International Spring Washington Conference on March 27, "Most of the people who go to a big city someplace are on the way to someplace else, so you can make a pretty good case that we ought to look...at wayports and airports in non-crowded areas."

FAA Aviation Forecasts, fiscal years 1996-2007, said, "Full consideration must be given to developing alternative means of mass transport and, if needed, building remote airports (wayports or megaports) away from the urban population with a seamless highway or fast rail connection into the urban area."

Alleviate Capacity

The National Conference of State Legislatures adopted a policy on aviation that "supports a coordinated national plan of development which accommodates state plans for investment. Such plan should consider the relative advantages of establishing regional hubs to alleviate capacity problems. Such hubs, known as 'wayports,' may offer an efficient and effective way to address the growing problems of airport congestion. The development of wayports could be an important economic benefit to many rural and depressed areas, as well as a cost-effective means of providing additional airport capacity. NCSL urges federal support of actions to investigate the feasibility of wayports."

Sen. Lott, (R-Miss.), in a news release dated April 10, 1989, which explained his introduction of legislation to establish a 15-member commission to study the feasibility of wayports, said, "If there is a way to relieve airport congestion, I want to explore it. This could be the answer." The wayports concept involves several airports located near, but not too near, major metropolitan areas. The sites would serve primarily as "switching points. "With the projected number of air travelers expected to increase dramatically in the 1990s, steps must be taken now to alleviate airport congestion," Lott

said. "The Wayport Development Act of 1989 will help us find the solution."

Sen. McCain, in an interview with Airport Magazine in 1989, said, "We would not have a problem with slots if we had enough places to land. We would not have a problem with hub concentration if we had enough airports." McCain said he was "absolutely" in favor of wayports.

The concept was not widely supported by U.S. airlines, particularly those at mega-hubs.