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**AIRPORTS LAUNCH LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVE TO
"EASE" GRIDLOCK AND MEET FUTURE DEMAND**

ALEXANDRIA, VA, and WASHINGTON, D.C. -- March 12 -- The American Association of Airport Executives (AAAE) and the Airports Council International - North America (ACI-NA) are submitting a legislative proposal to Congress and the Bush Administration that would reduce aviation system gridlock. The goal is to speed runway construction and other critical expansion projects at the nation's most congested airports by both streamlining and expediting current environmental reviews.

The proposal, titled the "Expedited Airport System Enhancement (EASE)" initiative, would give priority to national airport capacity projects identified as most critical and streamline reviews of these projects without relaxing or changing existing environmental laws. In addition, the proposed bill would improve procedures at FAA and elsewhere in the federal government to make sure that these critical airport projects receive prompt attention.

"The need for aviation infrastructure improvements is fundamentally compatible with the need for environmental progress," ACI-NA president David Z. Plavin said. "What is not compatible is the stark contrast between the urgent need to produce aviation infrastructure improvements and the traditionally slow pace of identifying the environmental safeguards which need to accompany these improvements. Slow decision-making does not translate into better environmental results."

"The nation is about 50 miles of runways short of where we need to be to meet future demands," AAAE President Chip Barclay said. "In light of the current volume of travel and the projected growth within the next decade, we cannot afford to allow critical capacity enhancing projects such as runway construction at major airports to become mired in an unending process that produces no measurable environmental benefit."

Highlights of the EASE proposal include:

- ◆ A declaration of "Critical National Airport Capacity" projects
- ◆ Priority processing by all agencies of critical airport capacity projects
- ◆ An airspace system capacity enhancement council or czar
- ◆ Airport funding of additional project-specific FAA staff
- ◆ Categorical exclusions expansion
- ◆ Facilitation of agreements with local governments to allow additional mitigation for critical airport capacity projects
- ◆ Realistic state air quality implementation plans, and
- ◆ The elimination of the Governor's certificate requirement.

Passenger traffic in the United States has increased by 40 percent in the past 10 years and is expected to exceed one billion by the end of the decade. In order to keep pace with anticipated passenger growth, airports would have to re-create the equivalent of the 17 largest airports or 10 new airports the size of Atlanta Hartsfield, Chicago O'Hare or Dallas/Ft. Worth, according to an ACI-NA economic estimate.

While continued financial support from the federal government is a must, airports have most of the necessary funding to expand, thanks in large part to the passage in the 106th Congress of AIR-21, the "Wendell H. Ford Aviation Investment and Reform Act for the 21st Century." Unfortunately, the process for approving these expansion projects routinely gets bogged down in a seemingly endless maze of overlapping, duplicative and onerous reviews. In some cases, these reviews have held up critical construction projects for twenty years.