Prepared Statement of Monte R. Belger
to the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks
Upon the United States

June 17, 2004

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Commission:
Thank you for the invitation to provide my perspective about the Federal Aviation
Administration's response to the attack against our country on September 11, 2001. At
that time I was the Acting Deputy Administrator of the FAA. I retired from the FAA in
September 2002.

The purpose of the Commission is to provide a full and complete report and to examine
the lessons learned to prevent a tragedy like September 11th from happening again. This
Commission can serve a very positive purpose by focusing on the lessons learned and
ensuring that improvements have been implemented to improve any weak areas of our
defense. In response to your objectives for today's session, I would like to provide a
brief account of the actions taken by the FAA on 9/11, the lessons learned, and changes
that were made following 9/11 to strengthen our capability to respond.

FAA HEADQUARTERS' RESPONSE TO THE 9/11 ATTACKS

On the morning of September 11th, the first indication to the FAA Headquarters of a
potential problem was sometime after 8:30am when our Air Traffic office in HQ received
a report that an American airlines aircraft had a communication problem. The Boston
Center was aware that AA-11 was in distress and had started the process for a possible
hijacked aircraft.

Our air traffic personnel in the HQ immediately began to gather information from the
field facilities. My first knowledge of a problem that morning was upon my return to my
office from a meeting in the FAA HQ building. I was advised that an aircraft had hit the
World Trade Center. I immediately went into the FAA Operations center and began to
gather information. The initial reports to me were unclear—we did not immediately know
that AA-11 had crashed into the World Trade Center.

We launched into an information gathering response in HQ. Our Air Traffic HQ group
established communications with the field facilities to get as much information as quickly
as possible. And the tactical communications net, managed by FAA Security, was
established in the Washington Operations Center to link HQ with other FAA facilities.

I contacted the FAA Administrator who was in a meeting at the Department of
Transportation and she immediately returned to the FAA building.

During this time period I had several phone conversations with Sec. Mineta and his Chief
of Staff. I was on the phone with his Chief of Staff when the second aircraft hit the Trade

Center. When UAL 175 crashed into the second tower it was clear that we were dealing with deliberate actions.

As the minutes passed, the developing picture from our facilities became increasingly more alarming. There were numerous reports of aircraft that could not be contacted. Many of these turned out to be erroneous but we didn't know at the time. On a normal day in the system there are communication problems and on 9/11 we were faced with trying to quickly sort out minor problems from significant threats. There was confusion with the conflicting reports we were receiving. We did not know how many more possible attacks might be in progress.

FAA facilities in New York, Boston and the Air Traffic Control System Command Center in Herndon, Va. had already implemented decisions to restrict air travel in the Northeast U.S. by stopping all arrivals and departures in certain regions and at various airports.

As the events unfolded, we realized that we had to clear the airspace to stop any further possible attacks. After the Pentagon crash, direction was given to clear the airspace as quickly as possible and land all aircraft at the nearest airport. That order was immediately implemented.

The order from the Command Center to immediately land all aircraft was transmitted at 9:45am. By 12:16pm, less than four hours after the first attack, and less than three hours after the order was given, U.S. airspace was empty of all aircraft except military and essential emergency traffic. 4,546 aircraft were safely landed under unprecedented stressful conditions and all international inbound flights were diverted from U.S. airspace.

FAA controllers, supervisors, pilots, flight crews, dispatchers and the automation systems they used all performed flawlessly. When we knew that all remaining flights were safely landed, our attention turned to the process to re-open the airspace at some time. The decision to re-start the system was as difficult as the shutdown decision. Airports were required to re-certify their security status; airlines were required to implement new security procedures; and the airlines faced enormous logistical problems in re-starting their scheduled operations.

COORDINATION WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

Prior to 9/11, FAA's traditional communication channel with the military during a crisis had been through the National Military Command Center (NMCC). They were always included in the communication net that was used to manage a hijack incident. When a hijacking was reported, FAA security personnel activated a command center in the Washington Operation Center and a senior executive from the FAA's security organization was responsible for managing the situation and the communication network with other government and industry agencies. FAA would frequently ask the military, through the NMCC, for airborne surveillance of the hijacked aircraft to monitor its

movements. On 9/11 FAA did not have formal dedicated communication channels directly to NORAD. Although the FAA had letters of agreement with DOD and the FBI which defined procedures to follow and roles and responsibilities, it became clear that the events of 9/11 went far beyond the scope of those existing agreements. In the Headquarters and in FAA field facilities we were reacting to a real scenario that had not been practiced or modeled. Decision makers were reacting quickly, and in my opinion professionally in an untested environment.

Some of the major actions taken in the FAA Headquarters were:
- The Air Traffic organization set up a situation room in the air traffic offices. DOD liaison officers assigned to the Air Traffic organization participated in this situation room.
- The FAA Washington Operations Center (WOC) established communication links with internal FAA facilities and with other Government agencies. FAA records indicate that the NMCC was included in the communication network no later than 9:20am. The WOC was the primary focal point for emerging information that was provided to FAA leadership.
- The Air Traffic Control System Command Center in Herndon, Va. was our primary source of information about aircraft locations and reports of other unusual situations. Military personnel were assigned to the Command Center on an on-going basis and they became involved in coordinating actions with the military.
- The Administrator and I were in almost continuous communication with the DOT Secretary.
- We participated in several video conferences with staff from the White House and other federal agencies.
- The FAA security organization was participating in classified conversations with the intelligence agencies.
- The Administrator and I had numerous phone conversations with airline and aviation executives during this time period also.
- During this short time period we were also ensuring that the FAA's emergency response procedures and continuity of operations plans were ready to implement.

LESSONS LEARNED AND POST-9/11 CHANGES

The Commission has been provided an extensive listing of initiatives taken by the DOT and FAA after 9-11. Secretary Mineta and Administrator Garvey implemented numerous initiatives to strengthen airport and airline and general aviation procedures; deploying the National Guard to our airports; implementing a zero tolerance inspection and enforcement policy; requiring criminal history records checks for additional airline and airport employees; acceleration of the deployment of explosive detection machines; hardening cockpit doors; expansion of the air marshal force etc. Sec Mineta also immediately established two Rapid Response teams composed of aviation industry leaders, who provided positive recommendations to the Secretary.

Communications

After 9/11 the most significant improvement needed was establishing a direct communications link between FAA facilities, DOD, and NORAD. We could no longer rely on communication to NORAD through our Headquarters or through the NMCC. FAA air traffic personnel worked with DOD and other federal agencies to put in place procedures for direct communication between FAA and NORAD and law enforcement agencies. FAA assigned air traffic control personnel to NORAD facilities for direct support of air defense measures, and to support the newly-established Domestic Events Net (DEN). FAA established the DEN to link, in real time, FAA security and air traffic personnel at headquarters, the Air Traffic Control System Command Center in Herndon, Virginia, all Centers across the country, all NORAD Air Defense Sectors, and other federal agencies as needed, including Secret Service, Customs, etc. This 24hr communication net is operational today.

I asked for a review of the capabilities of the Washington Operations Center. The resulting report included recommendations to improve the response of the Operations center in the future. The report recommended changes to the organizational structure and immediate staffing increases. Both of these recommendations were implemented. Other recommendations included modernization of the physical space, review and modernization of communications capabilities and a strengthening of FAA continuity of operations plans.

All of these recommendations were adopted and completed by September 2002. This included the design and construction of a new Washington Operations Center Complex to oversee the operation of the Domestic Events Network (DEN) that constantly monitors the entire National Airspace System for possible anomalies or threats.

Procedures

FAA developed new air traffic procedures to relay timely notifications between FAA and DOD concerning identification and tracking of suspicious pilots/aircraft or targets of interest, specific international air carriers, and aircraft operations in or near certain airports and areas of interest. FAA developed air traffic control procedures that could be implemented at each threat level established by DHS.

Surveillance Coverage

FAA has integrated all long-range radars into the NORAD system so that all of the Continental U.S. may be viewed. Additional work is ongoing to integrate terminal radars to increase the coverage area.

Airspace Security

FAA implemented special security measures and airspace changes, and expanded temporary flight restrictions (TFRs) and other airspace control measures to support DoD and law enforcement agencies engaged in NAS threat detection and/or defensive activities.

FAA developed software to graphically depict these national security TFRs, then established internet access to them for flight service specialists and NAS airspace users. FAA expanded its Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) processing capability to support the increased number of NOTAMs required for NAS security restrictions, and set up a Flight Service Operations Support Center to explain complicated airspace security restrictions to flight service specialists.

Planning

I believe that FAA continues to draw lessons learned from crisis management exercises and real-time events to continually re-evaluate and revise air traffic control plans and procedures for NAS security. FAA also developed a set of broad instructions to be used as a guideline if the U.S. airspace system is ever again used in terrorist activities

RECOMMENDATION

I have one recommendation, which I am not sure has been given enough attention, to give to the Commission. Prior to 9-11, the procedures for managing a traditional hijacked aircraft were in-place and well tested between the FAA, FBI, DOD, the airlines and airports. Those basic procedures had been in place since the 1970's. Responsibility for managing a hijack situation and for decision making was defined between the FBI and the FAA. In today's world those procedures obviously have changed and the roles of TSA, DOD, FBI and the FAA have changed. TSA now has responsibilities that previously were the FAA Administrators'; DOD clearly has a more dominate role; and the FAA air traffic organization has much more responsibility.

Your Commission should strongly recommend, in my opinion, that the primary government and industry organizations frequently rehearse and practice their response to incidents and draw up formal agreements for responsibility in certain areas. There should be no hesitation about responsibilities in the time of a real emergency.

On the morning of 9-11 the FAA responded to situations never before encountered. Since 9-11, procedures, protocols and training have changed I hope that the extensive steps taken by the FAA to better integrate the domestic air traffic control system with the air defense system of the United States will ensure a quicker more reliable response capability. I also hope that the Commission's report will focus on constructive recommendations for the future.

Monte R. Belger