

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2309

October 23, 2009

The Honorable Ray LaHood
Secretary
Department of Transportation
400 Seventh St., SW
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary LaHood:

Yesterday, Delta Flight 188 from San Diego overshot Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport (MSP) by 150 miles, flying into Wisconsin before turning around and landing safely at its intended destination. Fortunately, in this case, passengers were unharmed. Unfortunately, this was not an isolated incident. Yesterday's overshoot, the February 2008 overshoot in Hawaii, and the nine hour Rochester tarmac delay in August all highlight the critical need to revamp our national air traffic control system.

As the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) conducts a full investigation of Thursday's overshoot, I ask that you take additional measures to review all relevant operational protocols and regulations. Everything possible must be done to ensure public safety and prevent similar incidents from happening in the future.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is currently reviewing the rules governing how many hours commercial pilots may fly and remain on duty. Preliminary reports suggest that pilot distraction and/or fatigue may have been contributing factors in the Flight 188 overshoot. Ensuring that flight crews receive adequate rest is key to maintaining a safe aviation system. I ask that you work with Administrator Babbitt to expedite that process.

Furthermore, as passengers fly across the country, we must ensure appropriate and effective communications between flight crews, cabin crews, dispatchers, and ground crews. To that end, I also ask that you work with Administrator Babbitt to review the Sterile Cockpit Rule and its implementation to make any necessary adjustments to improve communications between all parties involved in commercial flights.

As you investigate this matter, I respectfully ask that you keep me updated on any findings and any steps the Department is taking. I thank you for your leadership and appreciate your assistance on these matters.

Sincerely,



Al Franken
United States Senator