Statement of the Honorable Ken Calvert, Ranking Republican
Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics
The Federal Aviation Administration's R&D Budgetary Priorities for Fiscal Year 2008
Thursday, March 22, 2007

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for calling today's hearing to examine the Federal Aviation Administration's R&D budget request for Fiscal Year 2008.

The FAA plays a unique federal role. Not only does it regulate air carriers, pilots, airports, and aircraft design and operations, it also operates the nation's air traffic control system 24/7. A huge part of our economy, including the commercial air carrier system, is dependent on FAA to provide navigation and air separation services to ensure delivery of goods and services to every corner of our nation.

Against this backdrop, FAA's budget request for FY08 is $14.1 billion, yet its request for Research, Engineering and Development is $140 million, or about one percent of its overall annual budget. Looking more broadly at all R&D activities within the agency, its investment ticks up to $260 million, not quite 2 percent.

For an entity that relies on a nationwide state-of-the-art network of communications, tracking, and guidance systems, this is a startlingly low level of funding, yet it's possible because historically – over the last forty plus years – FAA has relied on the National Aeronautics and Space Administration to perform a large R&D role, especially in the area of air traffic control. The relationship between FAA and NASA is changing, but more on that in a moment.

FAA's Research, Engineering and Development (R,E&D) program emphasizes a research agenda that focuses largely on aircraft safety design, materials, human factors, weather, environment, and fuels, among others. The technologies they've developed have led to important breakthrough products, examples being fuel inerting systems, flame retardant materials, and aircraft de-icing systems. This brief list doesn't do justice to their work, but it gives an indication of the many types of valuable technologies they've brought to marketplace.

There is plenty more research still to be done, especially as new aircraft and materials are introduced. Consider, for instance, the number of very light jet models under development, and Boeing's new 787 with the first all-composite fuselage. The technologies incorporated in these designs, and their operation and behavior, must be fully understood if FAA is to maintain an enviable safety record. And FAA, together with other federal agencies, continues important weather prediction research.

I am concerned, however, about FAA's R&D budget going forward, especially with regard to taking on a greater role researching and developing new air traffic control technologies. As I mentioned a moment ago, NASA has traditionally done much of the basic research related to our nation's air traffic control system. But the relationship

appears to be changing as NASA reduces its expenditures for airspace systems research. NASA has also stated that it will no longer develop technologies to a level of maturity enabling quick adoption without huge additional investment and years of research, a capability that FAA may not possess today.

I'm interested to hear our witnesses describe FAA's challenges, and whether, in their view, sufficient budgetary resources being brought to bear on solving them, as well as offer their assessment about the content and scope of FAA's R&D portfolio.

Commercial aviation is here to stay, and its role connecting the world's markets is growing dramatically, both in the number of people carried and the amounts and value of cargo delivered. There is no substitute for the services aviation provides, so it is incumbent on government and industry to research and develop safer, more efficient and environmentally benign aircraft to ensure uninterrupted growth in our economy.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and my thanks to our witnesses for taking time from the busy schedules to join us today.