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Rutland Region Transportation Council

June 20, 2003

OST - 1997-2784-27

Docket Operations and Media Management Division
M-30, Room PL-401
400 Seventh Street, SW
Washington DC 20590

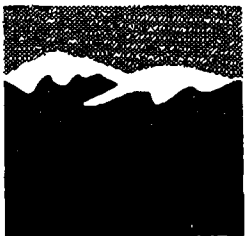
RE: Essential Air Service Program, Docket OST 1997-2784

Dear Secretary Mineta:

It is my understanding, from a briefing given during our monthly Transportation Council meeting, that the Department of Transportation has issued a tentative order to terminate the air service subsidy and eliminate the EAS Program for Rutland, Vermont. With the region's transportation problems in mind, I write to share with you our support for Rutland's air service and encourage you to look at alternatives to simply ending our air service.

The Rutland Region Transportation Council has been actively involved in the airport and air service for years. We supported many of the infrastructure improvements that underpin the kind of reliability needed to conduct commercial operations. We have also followed the changes in Federal funding for small airports and we are aware that programs for small community airports and air service, like the Wendell Ford Aviation and Investment and Reform Act (Air-21), the Small Community Air Service Development Pilot Program and the Essential Air Service Program that is currently in jeopardy, were intended for airports just like Rutland. It makes no sense to us to improve our small community's airport infrastructure and provide a program to help develop air service and then cut off air service before it has a chance to grow along with those improvements.

I know you are aware of the importance of airline service in small, rural communities such as Rutland and the large impact they can have on regional economies. I am sure that we share a common interest and understanding for utilizing the EAS Program as intended. Here in Rutland we have all worked hard to bring back and retain passenger air service, and know that it will come as no surprise that our specific concern is that without your further consideration it will be financially impossible for us to continue scheduled air service into the region. In responding to this objection, we ask that you consider opening the service to competitive proposals within the statutory limit or allow the community to come together with a proposal of our own to market our existing service



Because maintaining viable transportation alternatives for our poor highway system is so important in the region, we will endeavor to work closely with you. Even with today's low traffic counts, we consider our small airport to be a vital link in our existing transportation infrastructure. We certainly desire, like other communities in the past, a close look at alternative air carrier proposals or the efforts on the part of our airport sponsor to improve traffic. Please consider testing one of these proposals for a short time frame prior to terminating our air service. Perhaps accommodating our concerns now will help in your overall effort to manage the EAS Program within the confines of the law and direct our efforts toward favorable results in the near future.

I appreciate your consideration and efforts in managing the program in the past and look forward to working with you on this issue now and in the future. Should you need further communication or input regarding regional transportation issues, please contact me.

Sincerely,



Richard Baker, Chairman
Rutland Region Transportation Council

Copy to:

Jim Douglas, Vermont State Governor
John Cassarino, Mayor, Rutland City
Thomas Donahue, Executive Director, RRCC
William McGrath, Director, REDC
Senator Jim Jeffords
Senator Patrick Leahy
Representative Bernie Sanders
Patricia McDonald, Secretary, AOT
Dave Dill, Director, Maintenance and Aviation
Rich Turner, Aviation Program Manager
Thomas Trudeau, Rutland Airport Manager