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**CITY OF HERRIN, ILLINOIS**  
**300 North Park Avenue**  
**Herrin, Illinois 62948**  
**618/942-6166**

**Victor M. Ritter, Mayor**

July 12, 2004

United States Department of Transportation  
Dockets Operations and Media Management  
400 Seventh Street, S.W., Rm. PI.-401  
Washington, D.C. 20590

RE: EAS Community Participation  
Docket OST-2004-18443 - 13

Dear Sir:

The City of Herrin, Illinois, appreciates the opportunity to provide the Department of Transportation input with respect to the Essential Air Service (EAS) program, and the manner in which funding this program can best meet the needs of small communities throughout the country.

Williamson County Regional Airport accommodates the only scheduled commercial airline service for the entire region of Southern Illinois. Corporate Airlines d/b/a American Connection provides daily flights to and from St. Louis, with annual enplanements of approximately 12,000. Traffic potential in our region is far greater than that presently realized, but as with the airline industry nationwide, airline travel from the airport has seen limited growth in recent years.

As a result, in December, 2000, Corporate Airlines was selected by the Department of Transportation to provide service to the region under the EAS program at an annual subsidy rate of \$794,031. Without this assistance, and consideration of present air traffic levels, Southern Illinois could very well be without scheduled commercial air service. This remains a concern as air service is an essential component of the region's transportation network providing for the needs of existing business and industry, and assuring economic growth and development.

As you are aware, Congress created the EAS program in an effort to insure that certain small communities would continue to receive commercial air service after it deregulated the airline industry. The program has been very successful, although in recent years it has suffered from irregular funding. In addition, the present consideration of requiring local communities to fund a 10%-25% local share of the subsidy would seriously jeopardize the program's capabilities and original intent. Within the smaller communities that comprise the air service market in Southern Illinois, the resources do not exist to fund up to \$200,000 on an annual basis for continued EAS funding. The Williamson County Region Airport is not financially capable of backing such a local investment in light of its ongoing operation and maintenance cost.

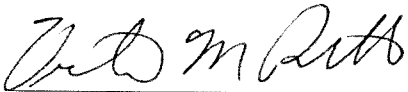
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On a smaller scale local communities and airports should be involved with promoting and developing air service to the extent practical. In our case, the Southern Illinois Air Service Task Force, consisting of representatives from the cities of Herrin, Marion, Carterville, and the Airport, has been effective in recent years of securing an air service development grant for the promotion of the existing service. The local monetary contribution of this effort is only \$5,000.00 per year. Moreover, the airlines should be closely monitored in order to insure that they are performing in a manner to provide and promote the service in order that the EAS subsidy does not result in complacency.

The EAS program, as established, is effective and will continue to be effective so long as the federal government continues its responsibility in administering the program through adequate funding.

Should you require additional information, please advise.

Very Truly Yours,



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Victor M. Ritter, Mayor

cc: Williamson County Airport Authority  
Senator Dick Durbin  
Representative Jerry Costello