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**Remarks to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities Study on Aviation Safety**

***May 4, 2017  
  
For the Canadian Airports Council: Steve Maybee, Vice President of Operations, Edmonton International Airport and Chair of the Canadian Airports Council’s Operations, Safety and Technical Affairs Committee***

Madame Chairperson, ladies and gentlemen of the committee, on behalf of the Canadian Airports Council (CAC) and our 51 airport members, thank you for the opportunity to present before you today on a topic that is important to airports: Aviation safety.

My name is Steve Maybee and I am Vice President of Operations for the Edmonton International Airport, and chair of the CAC’s Operations, Safety and Technical Affairs Committee. The CAC’s members include busy international airports such as Toronto Pearson and my own airport, but also smaller commercial airports like Saskatoon, Prince George and others affiliated with the ACAA.

As the voice of Canada’s airports in areas where our members have shared views, the CAC also provides a platform for airport professionals to collaborate among themselves, but also with Transport Canada, Transportation Safety Board, air carriers, Nav Canada, labour groups, and other partners on ways to improve safety at Canadian airports and within the aviation sector.

Aviation is a very capital intensive industry and regulatory requirements on airports have grown even more complex since they were transferred from the federal government starting in the early 1990s. Edmonton International Airport is one of 21 airports designated as part of the “National Airports System” and run by private, non-share capital corporations responsible for shouldering their own operating and infrastructure costs.

Using user fees and funds from operations, NAS airports have invested more than $22 billion into airport infrastructure since 1992. These investments have included not only improvements to the traveler experience, such as renewed terminals, but also airside investments with a focus on improving safety.

Airports work on an ongoing basis with the dedicated professionals in the Civil Aviation branch of Transport Canada. To the extent that we see opportunities for improvements in government’s approach to aviation safety, please understand that the bulk of our concerns are directed at the mechanics and processing within the system itself, rather than the hard working bureaucrats who are often as frustrated as we are with the pace of work to support our shared objective for a safe, modern and efficient world class air transport system. We challenge government and government challenges us.  That's how a collaborative air transport regulatory system works, resulting in healthy, robust, ever evolving regulations and one of the safest aviation sectors in the world.

Airports are strong and proactive advocates for measures to address safety concerns in the vicinity of airports, for example: laser strikes on air crews; and the proliferation of unmanned aerial vehicles/drones near airports. Our airport members were very pleased to see Transport Canada recently release an Interim Order addressing the rapidly growing UAV/drone problem.

Canada’s air transport regulations are being more closely aligned with international standards developed through the International Civil Aviation Organization, where Canada has at times played a strong leadership role. This has resulted in a more uniform and global approach to applying aviation standards and regulations. Aviation safety is an evolving discipline and we are never done.

Budget cuts at Transport have seen periods where the regulator is less able to engage with industry. The CAC and other aviation associations provide valuable fora for Transport officials to meet with a broad spectrum of industry professionals, but cuts have impacted their level of service and important collaboration with industry in recent months. There are always choices to be made, but there are significant benefits to aviation safety when the various components of the system, including TC, are able to work together.

Resources and the pace of work go hand in hand and Transport Canada has not been immune from government-wide deficit reduction efforts. In practice, this means officials have to prioritize their work and less pressing items go on the back burner. In one particularly frustrating example, in 2015 TC finally released the fifth edition of TP312 – an important technical standards document that airports rely on heavily. This update took 22 years.

Another concern is the attrition of expertise. Aviation is an industry with highly specialized disciplines. When Transport Canada ran airports, the department was its own institution for training and professional development on airport management and operations. Managers were brought up through the system, transferred between airports and back at headquarters in Ottawa.

Since the transfer of airports to local airport authorities and municipal governments, airports have had to develop their own proficiency in recruiting, training and providing ongoing professional development. Airports have developed this capability internally, by hiring consultants and by collaborating among airports.

The CAC is part of an international network of airports called Airports Council International and airport professionals in Canada have access to international training and certification programs. Canadians are active participants in ACI’s Airport Excellence in Safety program, which sees airport leaders worldwide participate in safety reviews at airports. Designed initially to provide peer support to airports in the developing world, it has proven to be an invaluable tool for promoting safety at all airports.

We need to ensure a healthy pipeline of aviation professionals are in place for Transport Canada. Many of today’s inspectors have never worked at an airport, challenging TC’s effectiveness in its demanding function as the country’s regulator. This problem will only become more acute as retirements at TC further deplete the already limited number of highly experienced officials.

Airports have offered to help, by working with Transport Canada on an employee exchange program whereby TC officials would spend time working at airports. Our colleagues at Transport see the merits of such a program; however, getting this set-up runs up against limitations in government hiring practices.

In fact, if there is one area in particular that we recommend this committee focus some attention in its deliberations, it is the matter of increasing the development of subject matter knowledge and expertise at Transport Canada. Getting this right is essential to maintaining and building on Canada’s leadership in aviation safety.

Thank-you for your time and I look forward to your questions.