

The Motorcoach Industry Position Essential Bus Service

Issue

The Essential Air Service (EAS) program continues to contract under the pressure of high fuel costs and a slowing economy effectively disenfranchising many rural communities from the broader transportation network. However, even with fewer flights serving fewer Americans program costs have increased four fold from 1996 to 2006¹.

Thousands of rural communities need connections to the national transportation system, yet only a handful receive service from the Essential Air Service program. In order to sustain their economic vitality, rural communities need alternative airport connectors to give them convenient and reliable hub airport access.

Background

EAS connects approximately 152 rural communities in the United States and its territories to regional and hub airports. The connections are provided by private airlines operating small aircraft on a contract basis. Communities are eligible for funding if they are located between 70 and 750 miles from the nearest hub airport. Within the Department of Transportation, the Office of Aviation Analysis administers the EAS program through the Essential Air Service and Domestic Analysis Division.

The Division administers the EAS program by examining the number of flights that should be provided to individual communities, the type of aircraft to be used, the carrier that should provide the service and the level of subsidy that the federal government will pay the air carrier providing the community's air service. The Office of Aviation Analysis has a program budget of over \$100 million for EAS and another \$20 million for marketing, research and aircraft acquisition².

In contrast to EAS the motorcoach industry has been providing nearly unsubsidized service to 14 million rural Americans without access to any other means of intercity connectivity. However, this service is primarily focused on creating connections with the surface transportation network.

Position

In order to reconnect rural communities that have been isolated from the broader transportation network with the contraction of EAS the U.S Department of Transportation should establish a pilot program to fund Essential Bus Service (EBS). Private motorcoach operators should be empowered to create connections between non-urbanized areas and hub airports. The EBS program should be flexible enough to allow operators to make stops at intermediate points to expand the accessibility of the traveling public to the transportation network. Furthermore, operators should be given meaningful access to existing hub airports and ground transportation facilities to ensure critical linkages across transportation modes.

EBS funding of \$50 million per year could be used for activities such as:

¹ Programs and Options for the Federal Approach to Providing and Improving Airline Service to Small Communities. General Accounting Office, September 2006.

² Ibid

ABA Position Paper

- (A) planning and joint marketing for bus transportation;
- (B) capital grants for bus shelters, park and ride facilities, and joint-use facilities;
- (C) operating grants through purchase-of-service agreements, user-side subsidies, and demonstration projects;
- (D) developing and enhancing security procedures for bus passengers connecting to commercial air services; and
- (E) enhancing connections between bus service and commercial air services at the airport.
- (F) coordinating public and private travel information to make it easier to access and use the significant connecting and intercity resources provided through the public transit, rail and the private motorcoach industry.