

Trust-Based Aviation Security System

A failed terrorist attack against Northwest Flight 253 on Christmas Day 2009 provided a wake-up call to the airline industry. We were reminded, yet again, that highly determined radicals and violent extremists continue to plot new and different ways to inflict great economic harm on an airline industry that has yet to fully recover from the staggering costs inflicted on September 11, 2001.

Following this attempted attack was a sustained public outcry about the inadequacies of our current aviation security system. ALPA shares those concerns because we know that – despite the fact that the nature of the threat has significantly changed – our current security system has not fundamentally changed since the days of the Cuban hijacking crisis. Security screening is still principally focused on the interdiction of dangerous objects before they are brought onto airplanes.

ALPA believes very strongly that the focus of our security resources should be directed primarily toward identifying those with hostile intent before they are allowed to board our aircraft. By using publicly available information, human interaction, and behavior pattern recognition techniques, much can be learned about passengers in a very transparent and seamless fashion. Technologies, such as metal detectors, x-ray machines, whole-body imaging machines and the like are valuable tools, but they can never replace the detection of hostile intent.

Because of our profound interest and moral obligation to our passengers, ALPA published last week a new white paper entitled “[Meeting Today’s Aviation Security Needs: A Call to Action for a Trust-Based Security System.](#)” ALPA is using this paper to promote better use of our limited security resources with several goals, which include greatly improving security, reducing the level of privacy intrusions on the vast majority of travelers, and reducing the amount of time most passengers must spend in screening lines.

The new security system should begin assessing the trustworthiness of passengers at the time of ticket purchase and continue until they board the aircraft. Those whose trustworthiness can be verified, which includes most airline passengers, should be screened according to new rules that will reduce delays and frustrations seen in today’s system.

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Airline pilots, and other employees who are trusted by virtue of their positions of responsibility and extensive background checks, should be accommodated at the security checkpoint in a manner befitting that trust. ALPA has developed the Crew Personnel Advanced Screening System (CrewPASS) concept as an essential component of tomorrow's security system. Congress and TSA have both given strong support for CrewPASS implementation; ALPA is presently working with the airline community to make it a permanent fixture across the U.S. airport system.

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