

THE WHITE HOUSE

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Februray 20, 1952

Dear Jim:

For some time now, I have been seriously concerned about airplane accidents, both commercial and military, that have occurred in the take-off and landing of aircraft, especially in heavily populated areas. I have been concerned about the loss of life and I have been concerned about the anxiety in some of our cities. I have decided to set up a temporary President's Airport Commission to look into the problem of airport location and use. I am delighted that you are willing to serve as Chairman of the Commission, and I hereby appoint you as such. Mr. Charles F. Horne, the Administrator of Civil Aeronautics and Dr. Jerome C. Hunsaker, Head, Department of Aeronautical Engineering, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, will serve with you on the Commission.

The present location of many of our major airports was determined a number of years ago when the aviation industry was new and operations were relatively limited. Also some of the locations reflected special military requirements. Since that time both civil and military air traffic have been growing rapidly, and simultaneously our cities have been continuously spreading out toward these airports.

Meanwhile, there has been great progress in the art of flying and in the development of supporting facilities. Striking advances have been made in aircraft and power plant development, in speed and service, in operational control of aircraft and in their ability to operate under a wide variety of weather conditions. A common system of navigation and landing aids for both civilian and military use, has been installed and is being maintained by the Federal Government on the Federal airways and at important airports. At the same time, the Nation's investment in both civil and military airports has undergone tremendous expansion.

Our present mobilization efforts have greatly speeded up the tempo of these activities, particularly in the design and production of aircraft and the construction of facilities for the military services.

In view of these developments, I feel that the Nation's policy on airport location and use should be restudied. We need a study that is both objective and realistic. That is what I want your Commission to do. In undertaking this survey, several major considerations should be kept in mind. On the one hand, provision must be made for the safety, welfare and peace of mind of the people living in close proximity to airports. On the other hand, recognition must be given both to the requirements of national defense and to the importance of a progressive and efficient aviation industry in our national economy.

In addition to these general considerations, I would like the Commission to take the following specific matters into account.

1. The Federal, State and local investment in existing civil and military airports and the factors affecting the utility of airports to adjacent communities.
2. Actions by Federal, State and local authorities to lessen the hazards surrounding existing civil and military airports.
3. Assignment of newly-activated military units to existing airports, with particular regard for potential hazards to the communities involved.
4. Site selection for new civil and military airports and the factors affecting relocation of existing airports.
5. Joint civil and military use of existing or new airports.
6. Legislation and appropriations necessary to carrying out appropriate policy.

Because of the urgency of the problem, I hope you will be able to give me your final recommendations within ninety days. In your work, you will have the full cooperation of all the Executive agencies whose functions and interests relate to your assignment. And you will want, of course, to keep in close touch with other groups concerned about this problem, including the Committees of Congress, local authorities and the aviation industry.

Arrangements will be made to meet the expenses of your Commission out of the Emergency Fund for the President.

Mr. James H. Doolittle
Vice President
Shell Union Oil Corp.
New York, New York

Sincerely yours,

HARRY S. TRUMAN