



**U.S. Department of
Transportation**

Office of the Secretary
of Transportation

The Inspector General

Office of Inspector General
Washington, D.C. 20590

June 1, 2001

The Honorable Adam Smith
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Smith:

Thank you for your letter of May 16 regarding the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport third runway project.

As discussed with your staff, we have an ongoing national audit addressing the extent to which airport infrastructure and air carrier scheduling are affecting delays. As part of that work, we are collecting baseline data on 14 airport runways planned to be completed by 2007, including the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport third runway.

The baseline data on the 14 runways are also part of a commitment we made to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation and Related Agencies. The baseline data will include each project's current estimated cost, milestones, status, funding sources, and major risks to the project's completion. We plan to brief your staff on the Seattle-Tacoma baseline data in late June.

We have also indicated to your staff that in conducting our major transportation project baseline reviews, we do not evaluate the project's substantive merits or the policy rationale underlying the project itself. Those are matters best left to state and local authorities and the Department of Transportation program office.

With respect to environmental reviews for airport projects, the responsibility and expertise for determining the project's environmental impact and appropriate mitigation steps rest with cognizant state, local, and Federal authorities. In accordance with your request, we will describe where the Federal Aviation Administration is at this stage in its environmental review process. However, the Office of Inspector General does not have the expertise to render an opinion on the adequacy of the review itself, and, in any event, cannot place itself in the position

of second guessing the environmental experts responsible for these important reviews.

Absent further direction from the Secretary, the congressional committees of jurisdiction, or indication of fraud, which has not been alleged in this case, our work will be limited solely to those areas outlined above.

If I can answer any questions or be of further assistance, please feel free to contact me at (202) 366-1959, or my Acting Deputy, Todd J. Zinser, at (202) 366-6767.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kenneth M. Mead". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kenneth M. Mead
Inspector General