

August 10, 2009

The Honorable Byron L. Dorgan
Chairman
Subcommittee on Aviation Operations, Safety, and Security
Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

Dear Chairman Dorgan:

I am writing to request that the Subcommittee on Aviation Operations, Safety, and Security move expeditiously to hold a hearing on the safety of "on-demand" aircraft—small, privately chartered aircraft, including helicopters.

This past weekend, a small private airplane taking off from Teterboro Airport in New Jersey and carrying three people and a New York City tourist helicopter carrying six people collided over the Hudson River, killing all nine people. This deadly crash highlights concerns not only with the specific airspace above the Hudson River, where pilots must navigate the busy skies through a tactic known as "see and avoid," but also with on-demand aircraft safety more generally.

According to a report issued by the U.S. Department of Transportation's Inspector General (IG) last month, on-demand aircraft receive far less oversight from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and have far more fatalities than commercial aircraft. Moreover, although the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) has identified a number of safety improvements related to small, privately chartered aircraft, the FAA has failed to implement these improvements. For example, following a 2005 accident in Teterboro, New Jersey, the NTSB made recommendations regarding flight attendant training improvements that could have mitigated the injuries during that crash; to date, the FAA has not proposed any regulatory changes to address these recommendations. In fact, the FAA's rules for small, privately chartered aircraft have not been updated since 1978.

In light of Saturday's fatal crash and overdue safety improvements for on-demand aircraft, I respectfully request a hearing to examine this critical aviation safety issue. Thank you for your consideration and please let me know if I can be of assistance.

Sincerely,

