

*New security equipment would increase airport efficiency and support new commercial jet air service crucial to the coastal economy*

**May 25, 2011**

**WASHINGTON, DC**— Today, Congressman Peter DeFazio (D-Springfield) led a joint letter with Senators Wyden and Merkley to Transportation Security Administration (TSA) Administrator John Pistole urging TSA to provide needed security equipment at the Southwest Oregon Regional Airport in North Bend.

“Air service is vital to the continued economic development and job creation on the South Coast,” DeFazio said. “Updated security technology in North Bend would increase efficiency and will be crucial to supporting the new commercial jet air service scheduled to begin next month. I am urging TSA to either provide new technology to meet the unique needs at North Bend, or to find surplus equipment in the system that would be appropriate to meet their needs.”

Currently TSA screeners at the North Bend Airport must screen both passengers and baggage for security threats. The baggage screening must be performed manually because the airport lacks the necessary technology. This screening process is further complicated by the large number of heavy golf bags that must be screened within a short amount of time, and the high number of false positives due to chemicals routinely found on golf courses. Screening baggage within flight schedule requirements will be an even bigger challenge once Sky West’s jet service between San Francisco and North Bend begins next month.

This summer, Portland International Airport will be moving to new in-line baggage screening technology. Last month, DeFazio requested that the surplus Portland equipment go to North Bend. Unfortunately, TSA determined the surplus Portland equipment is not appropriate for North Bend.

DeFazio’s letter asks TSA to consider the scheduled increased traffic volume at North Bend in determining its eligibility for new screening technology, and if that is not an option that TSA find surplus equipment elsewhere in the system that would be appropriate for North Bend to use.

The full text of the letter is below.

The Honorable John Pistole, Administrator

Transportation Security Administration

601 South 12<sup>th</sup>

Arlington, VA 20598-6005

Dear Administrator Pistole:

We are writing in support of a request previously submitted by the Oregon Director of the TSA, Mike Irwin, in support of Southwest Oregon Regional Airport (OTH), one of their spoke airports in North Bend, Oregon.

OTH has been struggling for several years to retain and improve commercial air service to Oregon's south coast, which has been particularly hard hit by the economic recession. Commercial air service is critical to the economic infrastructure and vitality of the south coast, as it is in many communities. As a result, it was great news when Sky West recently announced they will begin regional jet service, with 50 passenger RJ200 jets, between San Francisco and OTH beginning in June of this year. In addition, a significant number of passengers transiting OTH are guests and golfers at the world-famous Bandon Dunes Golf Resort.

The increased service introduces a new challenge for the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) at OTH. The current Explosive Trace Detection (ETD) baggage screening technology makes it difficult for the Transportation Security Officers (TSOs) to meet flight schedule requirements, particularly with respect to the inordinate volume of golf bags. The

additional service will inevitably cause additional delays, potentially putting OTH's commercial air service at risk.

The ETD system currently deployed is simply not efficient or effective enough to handle the significant volume of golf bags required to be screened at OTH. An associated challenge is the number of false positives due to chemicals routinely found on golf courses. In addition, the multi-level design of the airport terminal requires the TSA's very small staff to transit significant distances to accomplish the sequential process of baggage and passenger screening. The installation of an Explosive Detection System (EDS) would significantly increase efficiency, reduce the number of overall missed bags, delayed flights, and ultimately increase security.

We believe the airport would greatly benefit from a new CT80 XL EDS machine. We fully understand from our conversations with local TSA that the daily volume of passenger bags alone would not normally justify an EDS. However, we ask you to consider the unique circumstances at OTH. If a new CT80 XL EDS is truly not an option, we ask you to consider looking at surplus equipment from somewhere else in the system that would be appropriate to serve the unique screening needs of OTH.

Sincerely,

Peter A. DeFazio

Ron Wyden

Jeff Merkley

Member of Congress  
Senator

United States Senator

United States

- 30 -