June 26, 2017

The Honorable John Thune  
Chairman  
Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation  
512 Dirksen  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bill Nelson  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation  
425 Hart  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Aviation Operations, Safety, and Security  
512 Dirksen  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Maria Cantwell  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Aviation Operations, Safety, and Security  
427 Hart  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Thune, Ranking Member Nelson, Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Cantwell:

I am writing to express the views of ACEC – the voice of America’s engineering industry – on the Federal Aviation Administration Reauthorization Act of 2017 (S. 1405).

First, we applaud you for increasing investments in our nation’s aviation infrastructure through the Airport Improvement Program (AIP). America’s airports are powerful economic engines, generating more than $1.1 trillion in annual activity. Unfortunately, funding through the AIP has not been increased in more than a decade. The $400 million increase included in the bill will mark a small step toward the necessary investments to update aging facilities, relieve congestion, and enhance safety.

We urge you to supplement the proposed increase in the AIP program by giving airport authorities the option to adjust the cap on Passenger Facility Charges (PFCs) in order to finance needed improvement projects. Airports require $20 billion annually in infrastructure upgrades to adequately handle the growing number of passengers and amount of freight cargo anticipated in the coming decade. The PFC is an essential tool for funding and financing these projects – a user fee collected and reinvested to serve travelers and local businesses that rely on airports for their livelihood. We strongly encourage the committee to include a PFC adjustment as the bill moves through the legislative process.
ACEC also supports an amendment to require a Qualifications-Based Selection (QBS) process for airports acquiring architectural, engineering, and design-related services on PFC-funded projects. QBS is an open, competitive process that ensures that public agencies receive the technical expertise, innovation, and experience necessary to maximize project quality and protect taxpayer dollars. QBS has been federal law for over 40 years, has been endorsed by the American Public Works Association (APWA), and adopted by the American Bar Association (ABA) as part of its model procurement code. QBS already applies to projects funded through the AIP program, and we respectfully request that you extend this well established and time tested procurement process to PFCs.

We are encouraged by the bill’s recognition of the importance of safely and efficiently integrating unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) into the national airspace. Many engineering and design firms have embraced the use of UAS for a wide array of services, including surveying, mapping, site monitoring, and facility inspections, among many others. Utilizing UAS for these jobs can often be done with less risk and more accuracy than manned flights, with significant efficiencies and cost savings. We support the provisions in the bill authorizing FAA to approve beyond-visual-line-of-sight operations and operations over people, as well as additional risk-based permitting regulations for commercial operations. We also support the extension of the UAS test sites and continued research and testing of newer technologies. These enhancements will help our firms put UAS to good use in service to their clients and the public.

Thank you for your attention and consideration of the views of the engineering industry. We look forward to working with you on the bill as it advances through the legislative process.

Sincerely,

[Signature]
David A. Raymond
President & CEO

cc: Members of the Senate Commerce Committee