

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 14, 2023

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

We seek your assistance and leadership in helping complete the decades-long effort to modernize and expand one of our Nation's most important international airports, O'Hare International Airport (ORD), and **most importantly, increase ORD gate capacity by at least 25 percent**. As one of the busiest airports in the world, ORD is a critical link in our Nation's aviation system as a centrally located, dual hub airport with more than 750 domestic and 95 international nonstop flights a day—and it is vital that ORD expand to meet rising air travel demand.

The City of Chicago and Air Carriers, with critical Federal support and assistance, successfully rebuilt and enhanced ORD runways by completing the \$6 billion O'Hare Modernization Program (OMP) in 2018. The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT), particularly the leadership of then-Secretary of Transportation, the Honorable Ray LaHood, deserves significant credit for convening and mediating an agreement between all public and private ORD stakeholders to commit to completing OMP while facilitating an additional sizable Federal investment to help finish the project.

To maximize the return on investment from ORD runway modernization, it is imperative that public and private stakeholders once again come together to complete the ORD Terminal Area Program (TAP). This program will greatly enhance O'Hare and the airlines that use it by increasing gate capacity by at least 25 percent and creating a new, first-of-its-kind Global Terminal. Air Carriers, such as American Airlines, Delta Airlines and United Airlines, have already reaped concrete benefits from TAP's upgrades to Terminal 5 that grew its capacity by 25 percent and improved overall efficiency, which in turn enhanced our Nation's Air Carrier performance.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the costs of infrastructure projects undoubtedly have risen due to delays and inflation. While TAP was not immune from this, the project is only at 30 percent design, and the remaining design process offers all parties the opportunity to ensure costs remain consistent with the parameters agreed to by the parties in 2018, while preserving the capacity promised by that original TAP agreement. Just as USDOT, in prior years, intervened and reaffirmed a shared commitment to completing OMP despite cost concerns, the Department should once again demonstrate leadership in guiding TAP to completion in a manner that enables all parties to ensure cost reductions that do not prevent ORD gate capacity from increasing by at least 25 percent.

Accordingly, we request that you convene a meeting with all relevant ORD public and private stakeholders—including the City of Chicago, American Airlines and United Airlines—and help facilitate a path forward that reaffirms a shared commitment to increase ORD gate capacity by 25 percent through upgrades to Terminal 2 and 1; reduce TAP projected costs; and secure additional Federal investments from sources like the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law’s \$5 billion for airport terminal improvements.


Regarding the latter objective, the Illinois Congressional Delegation is ready and willing to help ORD successfully compete for Federal investments to ensure one of our Nation’s most important domestic and international air travel hubs continues to grow to meet demand and keep our country’s Midwest region economically competitive.

With TAP at only 30 percent design, now is the optimal time for USDOT to help the City of Chicago, the State of Illinois and respective Air Carriers identify and implement solutions to lower TAP costs through design modifications and additional Federal investments without compromising on the shared goal of ultimately increasing ORD gate capacity by at least 25 percent.

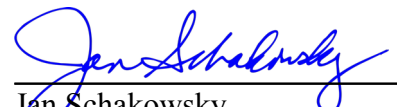
Such leadership would reflect the Federal Government’s clear stake in the successful completion of OMP *and* TAP as a major investor in both infrastructure programs, including a \$50 million grant awarded earlier this year to upgrade Terminal 3 to the benefit of American travelers, businesses and the Air Carrier, American Airlines, that serves them out of Terminal 3.

We thank you in advance for your leadership and look forward to working with USDOT as you convene and mediate a shared agreement among all ORD stakeholders that reignites a unified commitment to complete TAP and follow through on ORD modernization to strengthen one of our Nation’s most important domestic and international air travel hubs.

Sincerely,




Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



Mike Quigley
Member of Congress



Raja Krishnamoorthi
Member of Congress



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



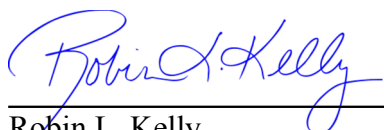
Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress



Bill Foster
Member of Congress



Delia C. Ramirez
Member of Congress



Robin L. Kelly
Member of Congress