



**U.S. Department
of Transportation**

Office of the Secretary
of Transportation

Assistant Secretary
for Government Affairs

1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

February 27, 2023

The Honorable Charles E. Grassley
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Grassley:

Thank you for your letter to the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) regarding the Secretary of Transportation's official travel. The Department shares your interest in ensuring effective and efficient stewardship of taxpayer dollars in activities carried out by DOT, including official travel by DOT officials. The Department is also committed to ensuring the safety of the traveling public and the National Airspace System.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) operates and maintains leased aircraft for important missions, including ensuring equipment allowing planes to land in near-zero visibility works, certifying new runways, and building more efficient approach and departure routes. When approved by career ethics officials, FAA aircraft may be used to transport government officials for official travel when it is more cost effective than flying on commercial aircraft or for exceptional scheduling or security reasons. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) directs how these costs are calculated for federal government agencies. Use of an FAA plane in limited, specific cases has helped to maximize efficiency and save thousands of taxpayer dollars. Because the FAA already budgets for the operation, maintenance, and leasing of the fleet for core FAA missions, government officials' use of an FAA aircraft incurs limited marginal operating costs. In other words, the FAA would incur the leasing costs regardless of whether the aircraft were used for official travel. The relevant DOT and FAA Orders that govern the Department's management and use of government aircraft and the FAA's Aircraft Management Program can be found at the following links, respectively: <https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/docs/dotorders/DOT-6050.1B.pdf> (DOT Order) and <https://www.faa.gov/documentLibrary/media/Order/4040.9E.pdf> (FAA Order).

The Secretary's official travel involves the use of federal funds regardless of whether the travel occurs on a commercial flight or an FAA-leased plane. The Secretary primarily travels by commercial airline and has directed that travel and logistical decisions be grounded in efficient and responsible use of taxpayer dollars. Given that commercial air travel is usually the cheapest way for the Secretary and his staff to travel, 119 of the 138

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flights for official DOT trips he has taken have been on commercial airlines as of the date of this letter. This represents the overwhelming majority of flights taken by the Secretary during his tenure. However, there are some cases where it is more efficient and cost effective for the Secretary and accompanying personnel to fly on aircraft leased by the FAA rather than take a commercial flight. In all cases, the Secretary's official travel on FAA aircraft has been justified and approved by DOT career ethics officials in accordance with OMB Circular A-126, *Improving the Management and Use of Government Aircraft* (May 22, 1992), the Federal Travel Regulation at 41 CFR Part 301, and DOT policy.

Thank you again for your interest in the Department's activities and ensuring accountability in the use of taxpayer funds. The Department is committed to effectively utilizing the resources that Congress has appropriated to the Department for management and use of aircraft and travel by DOT officials. If I can be of further assistance, please contact me at mohsin.syed@dot.gov.

Sincerely,



Mohsin Syed

Assistant Secretary of Government Affairs