

# Forward to the Future

**“Roads? Where we’re going, we don’t need roads.”** Remember this line from the film *Back to the Future*, when wild-haired Doc Brown gives teenager Marty McFly (played by Michael J. Fox) a glimpse into the future of transportation? Doc’s fusion-fueled, hovering DeLorean time machine is still the stuff of science fiction. But flying isn’t. ■ Fast-forward from the 1950s, when much of the film takes place, and air travel

has indeed become the wave of the future. Not only has aviation enriched our personal lives, it’s vital to the nation’s economy. And air traffic is projected to grow by a third in the next 10 years.

We’re definitely feeling growing pains, though. Some 45,000 commercial, private and military flights crisscross the United States every day, making our nation’s



airspace the busiest and most crowded in the world. Delays are worsening at many airports, including those served by Alaska Airlines.

The Federal Aviation Administration reported that June was one of the worst months in U.S. history for delays, with canceled flights more than doubling over last year. Chances are pretty good that you’ve been stuck—perhaps missing a connecting flight, a family event or an important business meeting.

How to fix it? A campaign by the airlines of the Air Transport Association makes good sense. “Smart Skies” advocates for reducing air-traffic congestion and

delays by using a bit of Doc Brown’s own medicine—looking to the future.

Like Marty McFly, today’s air-traffic-control system remains stuck in the 1950s. Controllers still use World War II-era radar rather than modern navigation technology. This forces aircraft to fly farther apart than necessary—contributing to delays—and in a connect-the-dots manner instead of the most efficient route from takeoff to landing.

Doc was right. Where we’re going, we don’t need roads.

Smart Skies advocates for modern technology based on satellite navigation similar to what Alaska Airlines pioneered in its namesake state. This technology keeps aircraft safely separated while enabling them to fly more directly

and closer together—with pinpoint accuracy—to reduce flight times and accommodate projected air-traffic growth.

The problems behind air-traffic congestion and delays are complex, and a modernized air-traffic-control system isn’t a panacea. But it would be a major improvement. That’s why Alaska Airlines and the nation’s other airlines hope to persuade Congress to embrace Smart Skies as Congress votes this fall on continued funding of the FAA Airport and Airway Trust Fund. Set up in 1970 to support the nation’s air-traffic-control system, the trust fund is paid for primarily by ticket taxes and fees charged to airlines and to you,

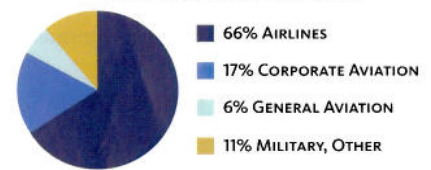
our customers.

This funding system made sense when it was implemented, but the playing field has changed. While the nation’s commercial airline fleet has tripled since 1970, the number of corporate jets has grown nearly tenfold. Today, commercial airlines use 66 percent of the air-traffic-control system,

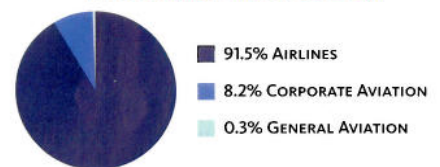


**BILL AYER**  
CHAIRMAN AND CEO

## WHO USES THE ATC SYSTEM



## WHO PAYS FOR THE ATC SYSTEM



but pay 91.5 percent of fees, according to the FAA. You and the airlines are unfairly footing the bill for a growing number of corporate aircraft, which use 17 percent of the system yet pay only 8 percent of the fees. One aim of Smart Skies is to make sure corporate aircraft pay their fair share.

If you agree that we need an air-traffic system for the future—paid for equitably by those who use it—I urge you to help make it happen. You can learn more about Smart Skies and send a message to your representatives in Congress via the Web at [www.smartskies.org](http://www.smartskies.org).

Thanks for 75 years of flying with us. ▲