AUVSI
ASSOCIATION FOR UNMANNED
VEHICLE SYSTEMS INTERNATIONAL

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20 August 2012

The Honorable Ray LaHood
Secretary
Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE
Washington, DC 20590

The Honorable Michael Huerta
Acting Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Secretary LaHood and Acting Administrator Huerta:

As you know, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Modernization and Reform Act of 2012, signed into law on February 14, 2012, required the FAA to establish a pilot program to integrate unmanned aircraft into the national airspace system at six test ranges. The law required the test range program to be put in place "not later than 180 days" after the passage of the FAA bill, or August 12, 2012. Unfortunately, this deadline has passed without the FAA meeting this crucial benchmark.

As the world's largest non-profit organization devoted exclusively to advancing the unmanned systems and robotics community, my organization, the Association for Unmanned Vehicle Systems International, is keenly aware of the enormous potential of unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) to make Americans safer, more secure and more productive. These aircraft have already helped law enforcement agencies, firefighters and other first responders in response to disasters including Hurricane Katrina, the flooding of the Red River in the upper Midwest and wildfires in the western United States. Public safety officers also see UAS technology potentially helping search and rescue efforts, the surveying of critical infrastructure such as bridges and dams, and providing aerial photography of accidents and crime scenes.

In addition to public uses, UAS have tremendous commercial potential, as well. Energy companies envision UAS monitoring miles of pipeline and power lines or safely surveying oil refineries, power plants or other areas hazardous to humans. Farmers see UAS as a more efficient way to spray crops. In fact, Japanese farmers are already using unmanned mini-helicopters to spray difficult-to-reach rice fields, while also monitoring the health of the crop.

The demand from both the public and commercial sector also means significant job creation potential here in the United States. A 2010 study by our organization found that the integration of UAS into national airspace could add 23,000 new jobs by 2025. Meanwhile, given the rapid pace of technological advancements in the two years since the report was compiled, we believe that number of UAS-related jobs added to the economy is likely to be even higher than previously estimated. Translating into roughly $106.6 million in wages each year, these jobs include UAS pilots, systems engineers and maintenance specialists, among others.

However, key to unlocking this potential and ensuring the U.S. remains a global leader in UAS technology is the establishment of the six FAA test sites around the country. This is a critical step in the process toward the safe and responsible integration of UAS into the national airspace by 2015.

I write today to request that the FAA open the site selection process without delay, so we can remain on the congressionally mandated schedule.

We look forward to the FAA's forthcoming announcement about the site selection process, as well as working with FAA and other stakeholders to ensure the integration of UAS into our national airspace is done as safely and responsibly as possible.

Sincerely,

Michael Toscano
President and CEO
Association for Unmanned Vehicle Systems International