



**U.S. Department of
Transportation**

Office of the Secretary
of Transportation

400 Seventh St., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20590

December 27, 2004

MEMORANDUM TO: Kenneth J. Mead
Inspector General

FROM: Norman Y. Mineta

SUBJECT: Holiday Weekend Airline Disruptions

As you know, problems experienced this past holiday weekend by two air carriers – US Airways and Comair – severely disrupted travel for tens of thousands of passengers. The two disruptions were unrelated, but combined they had a serious impact on holiday air travel. While the worst of it may be over, I am deeply concerned about the impact on the system and the continued hardship being endured by so many consumers. Therefore, I believe that we must learn from the situations to preclude their recurrence.

US Airways has attributed its troubles to a combination of weather and an unusually high number of employees calling in sick. Philadelphia was most impacted with flight cancellations and thousands of bags not getting to their destinations on time. Comair's problems reportedly stem from a major computer malfunction that prevented the carrier from scheduling sufficient flight crews. The airline cancelled its flights for several days, affecting passengers in more than a hundred cities. While weather was also cited as a factor by Comair, no other major carrier reported weather-related difficulties over the weekend.

As you are aware, my office contacted US Airways shortly before midnight on December 24 after being notified of the operational developments that had occurred. Given the serious nature of these matters, I am requesting that you join with the Department's Office of Aviation and International Affairs and Office of General Counsel to investigate the two situations. It is important that the Department and the traveling public understand what happened, what travelers were told by the carriers, why it happened, and whether the carriers properly planned for the holiday travel period and responded appropriately to consumer needs in the aftermath. Because of the nature of this problem, I request that this be an expedited review with a report to me as soon as possible.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter. I believe given the history your office has in such issues, the report will benefit from your involvement.