

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 23, 2025

The Honorable Sean Duffy
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Duffy:

I am writing in support of the Chelan Douglas Regional Port Authority's (CDRPA) request to extend its Small Community Air Service Development Program (SCASDP) grant award.

Located in the Wenatchee Valley, Chelan Douglas Regional Port Authority runs Pangborn Memorial Airport - the "front door" to the many businesses and visitors traveling to Wenatchee, serving 125,000 residents of Chelan and Douglas counties. The aviation system is an important catalyst and connector for growing communities like Wenatchee. The airport plays an important role in Washington state's economy - commercial air service at Pangborn is vital for regional economic development and connecting residents of North Central Washington to their destinations. The nearest airports serving destinations outside the Pacific Northwest are more than two hours away by car, making connecting air service to Wenatchee critical.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the region has only been served by twice-daily service to Seattle-Tacoma International Airport. Current load factors of over 82 percent on that route show a strong demand for additional service in the Wenatchee market. This demand is continuously supported by Wenatchee's leading apple and agricultural economy, growing business partnerships supporting Western Washington technology companies, and increasing tourism in the region.

In the 2024 FAA Reauthorization Law, I led efforts on the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation to ensure small and rural communities were given more resources to attract and retain more air service. We secured record funding authorizations for the Small Community Air Service Development Program (SCASDP) and Essential Air Service (EAS) programs. Although the State of Washington does not have any EAS communities, Washington state communities like Wenatchee stand to benefit from a 50 percent increase in overall SCASDP funding to \$15 million per year to help grow connectivity and economic development for Washington's residents and visitors. Congress clearly intends for communities like Wenatchee to be able to use their SCASDP grants and continue pursuing SCADP grant opportunities under the program through at least fiscal year 2028.

Certain circumstances have complicated Pangborn Memorial Airport's ability to use their existing SCASDP grant funds under the program. CDRPA was awarded a SCASDP grant in the 2017 grant cycle to secure service to the San Francisco Bay Area.

Despite macroeconomic setbacks, including the COVID-19 pandemic's significant impact to air travel across the U.S., the airport has continued to engage with air carriers about potential new service, and local cash contributions for matching funds remain committed.

As part of that engagement, the airport is currently in discussions about potential new service to Portland, Oregon, which would provide additional opportunities for connecting flights to travelers' final destinations. Extending the SCASDP grant will enable the airport to continue discussions with air carriers about establishing much-needed service to new destinations. For the nearly 125,000 residents of the Wenatchee Valley, extending this grant will help to bring more economic development, jobs, and connectivity to a vibrant smaller community in the Pacific Northwest.

I request your full and fair consideration of the Chelan Douglas Regional Port Authority's application to extend its SCASDP grant to enable new air service opportunities for Wenatchee and North Central Washington. Thank you for your attention to this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Maria Cantwell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Maria Cantwell
United States Senator