

## United States Senate

February 1, 2024

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg  
Secretary of Transportation  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Ave., SE  
Washington, DC 20590

The Honorable Carol A. (Annie) Petsonk  
Assistant Secretary of Aviation and  
International Affairs  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Ave., SE  
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg and Assistant Secretary Petsonk:

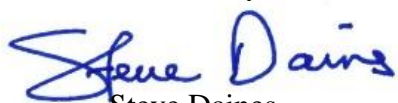
I write today regarding my ongoing concerns with the impact declining access to small community air service is having on Montana and to seek immediate action on SkyWest Charter's application for a Commuter Air Carrier Authorization. Communities across the state rely on this vital service and face severe economic hardship if action is not taken immediately to provide relief.

As you know, SkyWest is seeking commuter authority in an effort to combat the ongoing pilot shortage while continuing to provide and expand air service to small communities across the country. Although SkyWest's application was submitted to your agency more than a year-and-a-half ago, no action has been taken on your part since. This is despite my June 2023 letter to you on this subject and other outreach from various Montana community groups that are directly impacted by your lack of action on this matter. Air service is not a luxury for many rural Montanans, but rather a necessity. Without reliable air service, they often cannot access critical medical services and many communities rely upon the economic lifeline it provides. Communities like Butte and West Yellowstone stand to bear the brunt of the negative consequences from continued inaction, including hundreds of jobs and millions of dollars of economic activity lost.

Even in the face of the FAA's potential tightening of charter regulations, SkyWest has continually committed to exceed the baseline safety standards required to operate under Part 135, including hiring pilots that meet the 1,500-hour requirement for an ATP license, as well as any additional requirements that may be adopted by the FAA as part of the rulemaking process. With this and the growing need for small community air service in mind, it is impossible to understand the 19-month delay in consideration of the airline's application. I reiterate my call for an expeditious review and full consideration of SkyWest's application for commuter authority to ensure safe, reliable, and quality air service can continue to be maintained in Montana's rural communities. I am also seeking answers as to why SkyWest's charter application has languished for so long. Please respond to the following questions no later than February 21, 2024.

1. What is the average period of time for action to be taken on a charter application?
2. What is the longest period of time an applicant has waited for a response?
3. Is there additional information, data, or documents DOT needs in order to complete its review of SkyWest Charter's application?

Sincerely,



Steve Daines  
United States Senator