



U.S. Department  
of Transportation  
**Federal Aviation  
Administration**

800 Independence Ave., S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20591

JAN 29 2004

Andrew V. Cebula  
Senior Vice President  
Government and Technical Affairs  
Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association  
421 Aviation Way  
Frederick, MD 21701-4798

Dear Andy:

Thank you for your letter dated January 13, 2004. I appreciate your efforts on behalf of your constituency to make sure that we hear and consider their concerns.

By now, you are aware that we extended the comment period for the National Air Tour Safety Standards proposed rule to April 19, 2004. This will enable the aviation community additional time to prepare and submit well-considered comments. Such comments will greatly help us adopt a final rule that will keep air tours safe without unduly burdening aviation businesses.

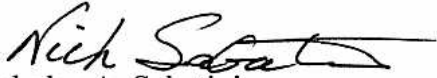
We agree that a public forum is a good way for the general aviation community to participate in a meaningful way in this rulemaking. We are seeking broad participation because the proposed rule will potentially affect many small businesses.

A traditional public meeting, or even a series of meetings, would not adequately allow broad input because the small businesses that this proposed rule may affect are spread throughout the United States, many of them in small communities. Many small business owners who could be most affected would be unable to participate because our limited resources would not allow us to hold a public meeting in every small community throughout America.

Through a virtual public meeting on the Internet, we can overcome the barriers of geography and limited resources. A virtual public meeting will allow input from any person with an Internet connection, even those in distant and small communities. A virtual public meeting will remain open for several weeks rather than for the day or two that a traditional public meeting is convened. A virtual public meeting is also considerably less expensive than a series of traditional public meetings. Thus, we can achieve greater public participation at much less cost to the taxpayers. We will publish a Notice of Virtual Public Meeting in the Federal Register within the next few weeks.

We have successfully held virtual public meetings on two other occasions. You can see an example of how a virtual meeting works by looking at the transcript of one of these meetings. You can find an example in the Department of Transportation Docket #12461, document number 20, on the Internet at <http://dms.dot.gov>.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nick Sabatini". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Nicholas A. Sabatini  
Associate Administrator for Certification  
and Regulation