



**NTSB** National Transportation Safety Board

## The Importance of an Independent Safety Board

UAA Aviation Policy Seminar

Robert L. Sumwalt  
NTSB

## NTSB's Mission

NTSB is an independent federal agency, charged by Congress to investigate transportation accidents, determine probable cause, and issue safety recommendations.





**1926**


## History

In 1926, The Air Commerce Act, charged the Department of Commerce with investigating the cause of aircraft accidents.



In 1931, a Fokker F-10A operated by Transcontinental and Western Air (TWA) crashed in Kansas, killing eight persons including Notre Dame football coach Knute Rockne.

**1931**





## 1931 Knute Rockne Crash



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The investigation was overshadowed by public perception of secrecy, incompetence and conspiracy.



1931





**In 1934, Air Commerce Act amended to require that reports on probable causes of fatal aircraft crashes be made public.**

*1934*



**In 1935, a DC-2 crashed in Missouri, killing five persons including US Senator Bronson Cutting.**

*1935*

**Public debate and criticism over the cause of the accident demonstrated the need for an independent investigative body.**








**1940**

In 1940, the 5-member Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB) was organized.

Accident investigative duties were assumed by the newly formed CAB's Bureau of Air Safety.



## 1956 Grand Canyon Midair



**1958**

Regulator

- Federal Aviation Agency (FAA) formed

Accident Investigation

- CAB Bureau of Air Safety remained in charge of civil aircraft accident investigation



**1967**

In 1967, US Congress created the Department of Transportation (DOT).

Within DOT was the newly created NTSB.

NTSB's authority to include all modes of transportation.





## April 1, 1967

- US Department of Transportation Formed
  - Federal Aviation Administration
  - Federal Highway Administration
  - Federal Railroad Administration
  - NTSB

Statute stated that NTSB would be an “independent Government agency, located within the DOT, to promote transportation safety by conducting independent accident investigations...”

**Is there a possible conflict here?**



In 1974, Congress made the NTSB completely independent of the DOT.

# 1974





## Independence

*“Proper conduct of the responsibilities assigned to this Board requires vigorous investigation of accidents involving transportation modes regulated by other agencies of government; demands continual review, appraisal, and assessment of the operating practices and regulations of all such agencies or its officials;...”*



## Independence

*... and calls for the making of conclusions and recommendations that may be critical of or adverse to any such agency or its officials.*

*No federal agency can perform such functions unless it is totally separate and independent from any other department, bureau, commission, or agency of the United States.”*





## Advantages of Independence

- Top priority and focus remains exclusively on safety
- Not influenced by politics, media, self interest groups
- Public trust, integrity and credibility
- Acceptance by public
- Transparency – the ability to look inside and see what government is doing
- Investigations that actually accomplish their intended purpose – prevent future accidents
- A safer transportation system



## Disadvantages of Independence

- ????



## The Board

- 5 Members, appointed by the President, with advice and consent of the Senate
  - Staggered 5 year terms
  - No more than 3 Members from same the political party



## What Do Board Members Do?

- Participate in Board Meetings
  - Deliberate Accident Findings, Determine Probable Cause, Issue Safety Recommendations
  - Adopt “Most Wanted List”
  - Adopt Safety Studies
- Vote on Opinions and Orders
- Congressional and Legislative Testimony
- Advocate Safety Issues
- Serve as NTSB Spokesperson on Major Accidents





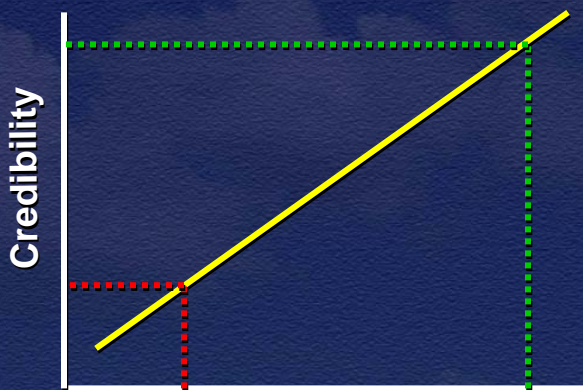
## Credibility

- Credibility is built with independence
- Independence relates to credibility



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## Independence Relates to Credibility



Independence

Low Independence = Low Credibility  
High Independence = High Credibility

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**An Independent  
Accident  
Investigation Agency  
builds trust,  
credibility – and most  
importantly – will  
serve to improve  
transportation safety  
within the US.**

