

National Transportation Safety Board

Office of the Chair

Washington, DC 20594



September 30, 2024

The Honorable Michael G. Whitaker
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Administrator Whitaker:

I am writing to follow up on the urgent safety recommendations that the National Transportation Safety Board issued last week to The Boeing Company and to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) concerning the potential for a jammed or restricted rudder control system on certain Boeing 737 airplanes. As you know, these recommendations were issued as a result of our ongoing investigation of the rudder pedal anomaly involving a United Boeing 737-8 that occurred while landing at Newark Liberty International Airport in Newark, New Jersey, on February 6, 2024.

Thank you for speaking with me last week, and for your immediate attention to this matter. However, I remain concerned that the FAA, as a whole, did not take this issue more seriously until we issued our urgent safety recommendation report, despite the risk of loss of control of an aircraft or departure from the runway occurring due to a jammed or restricted rudder control system, caused by a defect in certain rollout guidance actuators. Although our investigation is ongoing, I am disappointed that it does not appear that the FAA has initiated urgent actions to address the risk of jammed rudder controls in the 6 months since our preliminary report on this incident was issued. The case for urgent action is even greater since, after we opened our investigation, the FAA became aware of two similar incidents that had occurred with foreign operators in 2019.

Moreover, in briefing the media and congressional committees of jurisdiction, I was made aware that the FAA has been downplaying the urgency of this issue, maintaining that the units are no longer in service. According to information that we have received from Boeing and provided to the FAA, this is incorrect.

Boeing's August 23, 2024, Multi Operator Message stated that 353 affected actuator units were delivered to Boeing starting in February 2017. Of these 353 units, we understand that 73 have not yet been installed on airplanes. Another 271 affected actuators that may be installed on aircraft in service operated by at least 40 foreign air carriers; 16 may still be installed on US-registered aircraft. In addition to the 353 affected actuators Collins provided to Boeing, Collins sent 75 affected actuators directly to operators for aftermarket installation; some of these may be spares, while others may currently be on airplanes in service. Accordingly, it is essential that aftermarket installations of affected actuators also be clearly addressed.

Equally concerning is Boeing's failure to inform United Airlines that the 737 airplanes it had delivered to the airline were equipped with these actuators—and that the actuators were mechanically connected to the rudder control system. We are concerned of the possibility that other airlines are unaware of the presence of these actuators on their 737 airplanes. Consequently, their flight crews may not know what to expect if the rollout guidance actuator fails at low altitude or during landing and rollout, as occurred in this incident. Not making operators fully aware of the installed systems and equipment on the airplanes delivered to them is unacceptable and cannot continue to be tolerated.

Thank you for your urgent attention to these issues. I look forward to hearing more about the FAA's actions in response to these recommendations.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Homendy
Chair

cc: Secretary Pete Buttigieg
US Department of Transportation