CAPPS II: Passive, Carefully Limited, Effective Security

The enhanced Computer Assisted Passenger Prescreening program (CAPPS II) is a limited, automated screening system authorized by Congress[1] in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. It is being designed with the utmost concern for the individual privacy rights of American citizens.

Unlike CAPPS I, which is under the control of the airlines, the operation of CAPPS II will be under the direction of the Transportation Security Administration, the same agency charged with full responsibility for aviation security. CAPPS II will conduct infinitely more effective authentications of traveler identity. and will improve aviation security through a more robust risk assessment. As an added benefit, CAPPS II will relieve the airlines of the burden of operating the current CAPPS system.

CAPPS II will become a critical element in TSA's "system of systems" which now protects the aviation system, including the thorough screening of baggage and passengers by professionally trained federal screeners, enhanced perimeter security including background checks on all individuals requiring unescorted access to secure areas, fortified cockpit doors in all airliners, thousands of Federal Air Marshals aboard a record number of flights, and armed Federal Flight Deck Officers.

The CAPPS II system is being designed to identify persons who are involved with or linked to foreign terrorism and attempt to fly commercial airlines. CAPPS II does not profile based on race, ethnicity, religion or physical appearance.

CAPPS II will access government databases and commercial databases, including public source financial information. However, having "bad credit" does not imply that the traveler will be identified as posing any increased risk to aviation security. Instead, CAPPS II assesses existing data and rapidly authenticates the traveler's identity and determines if there is activity consistent with known terrorist activity.

Essentially, CAPPS II is a passive system activated by a traveler's airline reservation request. Under CAPPS II, airlines will ask passengers for a slightly expanded amount of reservation information: the passenger's full name plus other identifiers, including date of birth, address, and phone number. Neither the airlines nor TSA will ask for the passenger's social security number.

CAPPS II will conduct an authentication to verify the traveler's identity. Subsequently, the system will quickly scan various data sources and generate an aggregate numerical score. This score, will trigger a "green," "yellow," or "red" signal to TSA. TSA will never see the background information the computer checks – except possibly in the rare instances of a "red" signal indicating that a particular traveler has been identified as having known links to foreign terrorism. For this extremely small percentage of travelers, intense security interest is warranted including notification to law enforcement officers, and denial of boarding   The entire process is expected to take as little as five seconds to complete.

A small percentage of passengers will generate a "yellow" signal, requiring additional screening at the security checkpoint. The vast majority of travelers (designated as "green") will go through the normal screening process.

CAPPS II is an airline passenger screening tool only – the CAPPS II program does not have the ability itself to initiate random investigations. The purpose of CAPPS II is to: 1) authenticate identity and 2) perform a risk assessment of airline passengers. It will reduce the likelihood of innocent persons being misidentified at airports or confused with similarly named persons who may have foreign terrorist links, and will dramatically reduce the number of passengers required to undergo additional screening at airports as "selectees."

The system functions somewhat like the electronic lock to a secured area: you must identify yourself and satisfy the system before you are allowed entry. Persons whose histories or behavior are consistent with identified patterns of foreign terrorism may be flagged for further inquiry and resolution. The system's algorithms are designed to confirm passenger identity information, identify known terrorists, discern suspicious foreign travel patterns, and recognize connections to known foreign terrorist-related activities or individuals.

CAPPS II will operate with existing commercial and government databases that are already subject to privacy protections. In addition, CAPPS II will operate under a stringent privacy protection protocol being developed through discussions with privacy groups and the public. It is not designed to generate new intelligence. It is carefully designed to be strictly limited and temporary in nature. Once travel is completed, the data is deleted.

The system will operate under the oversight of appropriate Congressional committees and an independent CAPPS II oversight board to be established.

Once CAPPS II has been implemented, TSA will ensure that an appropriate ombudsman will be available to address the concerns of individuals who believe they have been incorrectly singled out for additional screening.

Under the terms of the competitively awarded contract, Lockheed Martin Management and Data Systems will assist TSA in developing the program, a passenger risk assessment and prescreening system. Lockheed Martin Management and Data Systems will develop, integrate, deploy and operate for TSA, a Risk Assessment System through a five year task order contract that provides flexibility to TSA to accomplish the goals as outlined in the Aviation and Transportation Security Act. The first Task Order was awarded for $12.8 million.

The CAPPSII pilot is scheduled for spring '03, while full implementation is scheduled for summer '04.

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[1] Under Section 136 of ATSA, which amended 49 USC 44903, Congress recognized that changes in CAPPS I were warranted, by directing the Secretary to ensure that CAPPS "or any successor system, is used to evaluate all passengers before they board an aircraft; and includes procedures to ensure that individuals selected by the system and their carry-on and checked baggage are adequately screened."