

STATEMENT OF  
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HEARING ON  
THE FUTURE OF AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL MODERNIZATION  
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➤ I want to welcome everyone to this morning's hearing on the Future of Air Traffic Control (ATC) Modernization.

➤ A major part of the Administration's FAA reauthorization proposal is to overhaul and transform our ATC system. Some have suggested that the Administration's proposal put the "cart before the horse" by emphasizing financing without fully explaining the Next Generation Air Transportation System (NextGen). Today, the Administration will have the opportunity to explain its vision for the future.

➤ While I have differences with the Administration regarding financing, I agree that our ATC system must be modernized.

The FAA forecasts that airlines are expected to carry more than

1 billion passengers by 2015, increasing from approximately 740 million in 2006. The Department of Transportation (DOT) predicts up to a tripling of passengers, operations, and cargo by 2025.

- At the same time, the increased use of regional jets, the emergence of low cost and new entrant carriers, more point-to-point service, and the anticipated influx of Very Light Jets (VLJs), as well as other new users such as unmanned aerial systems and commercial space vehicles, are placing new and different types of stresses on the system.
  
- Under the current system, controller workload, radio frequency voice congestion, and the coverage and accuracy of ground-based navigational signals impose limitations on capacity. The NextGen plan that is under development will consist of new concepts that rely on satellite-based capabilities; data

communications; information and weather capabilities that will support strategic decisions; and enhanced automation.

- While it is imperative that Congress provide the funding to make NextGen happen, NextGen is not just about financing. We have learned from the past that the NextGen system must evolve incrementally through sound contract management by the FAA coupled with vigorous Congressional oversight.
- Further, everyone should know the major capital requirements for NextGen may not entirely happen during this reauthorization cycle. As I have stated in the past, the FAA is requesting less capital funding during the three years of its new proposal than what it requested in the first three years of its last proposal.

- Moreover, the Administration must develop a better grasp on long-term NextGen costs. Earlier this year, the Department of Transportation Inspector General (“the IG”) reported that there are still unknowns regarding NextGen costs, which will depend on, among other things, performance requirements for new automation, weather initiatives, and the extent to which FAA intends to consolidate facilities.
  
- The IG has reported that, in the past, the FAA’s major acquisitions have experienced billions of dollars of cost growth and years of schedule delays directly due to overly ambitious plans, complex software development, changing requirements, and poor contract management. The IG has also stated that the FAA must articulate a strategy for how it will mitigate past problems that have led to massive cost growth.

- For many years, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) has consistently reported that failing to involve air traffic controllers in the technology development process to resolve tricky “human factors” issues has led to costly reworks and delays.
  
- The IG has noted that the need for focused “human factors” research has important safety implications. Common sense would suggest that the people that will be using and maintaining this new technology should be involved in its development.
  
- Therefore, I am concerned that GAO is now reporting that no current controllers or technicians are involved at the more detailed group planning levels for NextGen. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on this issue.

- In addition, it is clear that the Administration envisions a major role for the private sector in the development and implementation of NextGen. For example, the FAA intends to structure its Automatic Dependant Surveillance – Broadcast (ADS-B) acquisition – which will be the primary ATC surveillance system for the entire national airspace system - as a service contract or lease.
  
- Further, while Congress debates whether to allow the FAA to charge user fees, the FAA may consider allowing its ADS-B vendor to charge fees for service. I think that this approach has serious implications, and it is time for Congress to engage in this discussion.
  
- With that, I want to again welcome all of our witnesses today and I look forward to the testimony.

➤ Before I recognize Mr. Petri for his opening statement, I ask unanimous consent to allow 2 weeks for all Members to revise and extend their remarks and to permit the submission of additional statements and materials by Members and witnesses.

Without objection, so ordered.