



Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

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November 20, 2019

The Honorable Calvin Scovel III  
Inspector General  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue S.E.  
West Building, W70-300  
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Inspector General Scovel:

Based in large part on your office's prior work, I continue to have serious reservations about the quality of Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) oversight of aeronautical repair stations. To that end, I introduced a bill last week to require the FAA to take specific steps to improve its oversight of repair stations located outside the United States.<sup>1</sup> And in light of recent revelations, I am equally doubtful of the agency's oversight of domestic repair stations. For example, we recently learned that the angle-of-attack vane on the 737 MAX that operated the doomed Lion Air flight 610 last year was improperly maintained at a repair station in Florida. The FAA has since revoked that facility's repair station certificate. Moreover, I understand, both from your office's pending work as well as information from the FAA, that a domestic repair station was at least partially at fault for incomplete inspections and paperwork reviews that led to the induction of 88 used airplanes of unknown airworthiness into the Southwest Airlines fleet between 2013 and 2017.

The FAA oversees more than 4,000 repair stations in the United States, under the watch of just 729 inspectors, according to information provided by FAA staff. At the same time, air carriers are outsourcing a substantial amount of maintenance on airframes, powerplants, and components. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) reported in 2016 that 61 percent of U.S. airlines' maintenance spending was attributable to outsourced maintenance. The GAO further reported that a single airline utilized approximately 300 domestic repair stations.<sup>2</sup> It is clear from the tragic Lion

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<sup>1</sup> H.R. 5119, the "Safe Aircraft Maintenance Standards Act" (116 Cong.).

<sup>2</sup> Gov't Accountability Office, "FAA's Risk-Based Oversight for Repair Stations Could Benefit from Additional Airline Data and Performance Metrics," Rpt. No. GAO-16-679 (2016).


Air flight 610 accident that the flying public has paid the price for faulty contract maintenance work— and potentially defective oversight— in the United States.

Accordingly, I request that your office perform an audit of the effectiveness of the FAA's oversight and surveillance of repair stations in the United States. Specifically, in addition to such matters as your staff deems appropriate, I request that the audit address the following questions:

- (1) How often do FAA inspectors physically observe work conducted at repair stations and make judgments about the quality of that work as opposed to merely observing paperwork?
- (2) How many times per year do FAA inspectors visit a single repair station, on average, and are these visits sufficient to provide inspectors with a reasonable basis for assessing compliance with applicable Federal Aviation Regulations?
- (3) To what extent has the FAA implemented, to your satisfaction, the recommendations contained in your office's May 1, 2013, report on the subject of repair station oversight?<sup>3</sup>
- (4) Do FAA inspectors perceive any pressure from FAA management to initiate compliance actions rather than enforcement actions in their surveillance of repair stations?
- (5) How effectively has the FAA implemented a risk-based oversight model with respect to repair stations?

Thank you for your attention to this request. If you or your staff have any questions in the course of conducting this audit, please contact [REDACTED]

Sincerely,



PETER A. DeFAZIO  
Chairman

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<sup>3</sup> Dep't of Transp. Office of Insp. Gen., "FAA Continues to Face Challenges in Implementing a Risk-Based Approach for Repair Station Oversight," Rpt. No. AV-2013-073 (May 1, 2013).