Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 24, 2026

The Honorable Bryan Bedford
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20024

Dear Administrator Bedford,

We are alarmed by the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) recent announcement that its AI-powered flight routing software, dubbed SMART (Strategic Management of Airspace, Routes, and Trajectories), was deployed across the national airspace on November 10, 2026, without any advance public disclosure or Congressional notification.[1] This sudden expansion of a largely untested system to all air route traffic control centers (ARTCCs) across the country—a mere 50 days after SMART's initial launch in the National Capital Region—contradicts what you told Congress would be a gradual, methodical 90-day validation period.[2] Moreover, this action raises concerns regarding the transparency of air traffic control (ATC) modernization efforts and FAA leadership's commitment to prioritizing aviation safety above all else.

Disturbingly, recent reporting and credible information provided to our offices indicate that the FAA may be engaging in retaliatory behavior against employees who raised safety concerns about SMART's rapid deployment.[3] If true, this could fundamentally undermine the FAA's safety culture, which is essential to the open communications that aviation professionals rely upon to report risks to the U.S. airspace and protect the flying public.

As the FAA touted SMART's potential to optimize airspace usage and minimize delays, concerns surfaced across the aviation sector.[4] Frontline aviation workers were excluded from the system's development and continue to be left out of the deployment process. Members of Congress have been clear in demanding proactive notification and transparent disclosure of data and performance metrics from the FAA as SMART is operationalized in the nation's most congested airspace.

Despite these challenges, rather than proactively reassuring Congress and airspace users, the FAA has expanded SMART operations nationwide without prior official FAA communications on the matter. It is unacceptable that the FAA failed to keep Congress apprised of radical changes to the scope of SMART's deployment. We have yet to receive any substantive information proving the system was properly validated before its nationwide expansion, despite the FAA's stated plans to develop weekly

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[1] Oriana Pawlyk, "FAA begins nationwide rollout of AI air traffic tool," *Politico*, November 10, 2026, https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/2026/11/faa-begins-nationwide-rollout-of-ai-air-traffic-tool-01159284

[2] FED. AVIATION ADMIN., SMART: TRANSFORMING NATIONAL AIRSPACE (Oct. 1, 2026) (Slides on file with Comm.); FED. AVIATION ADMIN., BRAND-NEW AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL SYSTEM: WORKING FAMILIES TAX CUT ACT UPDATE (Sept. 15, 2026) (Slides on file with Comm.).

[3] Kate Kelly, Nicholas Nehamas, Karoun Demirjian, "Ground Stop Came as Duffy Pushed to Rapidly Upgrade Aviation Systems", *The New York Times,* November 18, 2026, https://www.nytimes.com/2026/11/18/us/sean-duffy-ground-stop-faa-trump.html?eafs_enabled=false

[4] Oriana Pawlyk," Inside airlines' panic as FAA pushed new AI tool", POLITICO, (Sept. 18, 2026), *available at:* https://www.politico.com/news/2026/09/18/faa-ai-airline-pushback-01083385.

performance reports.[5]

Given the troubling new developments regarding the FAA's approach to SMART deployment and Congress's legislative duty to authorize FAA programs, we request responses to the following questions as soon as possible, but no later than Monday, November 30, 2026:

1. What specific performance data did the FAA use to validate SMART operations and justify the system's deployment across 22 ARTCCs, prior to completion of the announced system validation period?

2. Has the FAA established a clear and consistent set of performance metrics to track the reliability, adoption, and impact of SMART flight routing recommendations?
    a. If so, where is SMART in reaching its set performance targets?
    b. When will these metrics be communicated to Congress and other key aviation safety stakeholders?

3. What specific safety risk management activities did the FAA conduct on SMART and its impacts on ATC operations prior to this recent nationwide deployment, and what were the findings of these activities?

4. How has the FAA engaged and coordinated with the frontline safety workforce in SMART's recent nationwide deployment?
    a. What training has the FAA provided air safety professionals across the nation who will be interacting with and relying upon SMART-generated recommendations?

5. What feedback did the FAA receive from air safety professionals in the National Capital Region regarding the use of SMART in their workflows prior to system expansion?

6. What issues have the FAA and Air Space Intelligence (ASI) identified since SMART's initial launch? How are the FAA and ASI working to resolve these issues?

7. Beyond geographic expansion, in what ways has the scope of SMART's functionality or capabilities changed since the system's initial launch?

8. As the FAA has rapidly scaled up SMART's operations, how has the recommendation review process within the DOT SMART Center changed?
    a. How is the FAA ensuring that all ARTCCs are adequately staffed and resourced to respond to requests and recommendations from the SMART Center?

9. Why has the FAA prioritized deployment of SMART over completion of foundational phase one ATC modernization projects, including radars, identified as behind schedule that are essential to airspace safety?

[5] FED. AVIATION ADMIN., BRAND-NEW AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL SYSTEM: WORKING FAMILIES TAX CUT ACT UPDATE (Sept. 15, 2026) (Slides on file with Comm.).

10. What additional cybersecurity measures has the FAA implemented to ensure the integrity of our ATC system as the agency transitions to more reliance on cloud-based technologies?

11. What redundancies does the FAA have in place to ensure reliable ATC operations in the event of issues or outages impacting SMART?

12. The FAA's new $50 billion budget request includes $600 million for strategic air traffic flow management technologies including SMART. If the system is already deployed across the national airspace, why does SMART require additional funding?
    a. Can you explain the specific activities which this additional SMART funding would support?

13. How will the FAA ensure that its workforce can safely report safety risks to the American public without fear of retaliation?
    a. What is the FAA's response to alarming reports of retaliatory behavior regarding the SMART deployment?
    b. How will the FAA reinforce the importance of its safety culture even as new technologies and systems are implemented?

The federal government is dealing with a crisis of confidence. After the November 13 nationwide ground stop stranded an estimated 1.5 million passengers, Americans' faith in the aviation system is shaken. The opacity and inconsistency with which the FAA has handled the SMART rollout threatens to further undermine that trust.

Transparency and accountability are non-negotiable in ensuring the success of ATC modernization and the safety of the flying public. We look forward to your prompt attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

Rick Larsen
Ranking Member
Committee on Transportation
and Infrastructure

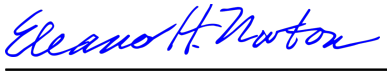
André Carson
Member of Congress

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress

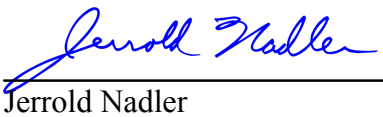
April McClain Delaney
Member of Congress



Nellie Pou
Vice Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Aviation



Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



Jerrold Nadler
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Dina Titus
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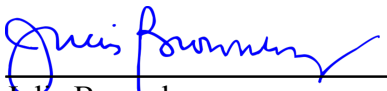

Julia Brownley
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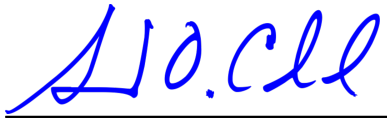

Salud Carbajal
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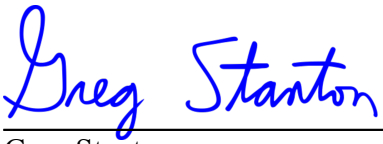
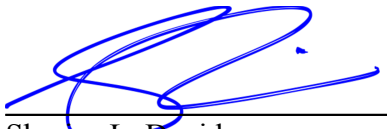


Greg Stanton
Member of Congress



Sharice L. Davids
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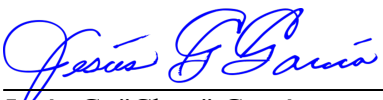

Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress



Patrick Ryan
Member of Congress



Val Hoyle
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Emilia Strong Sykes
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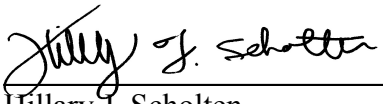

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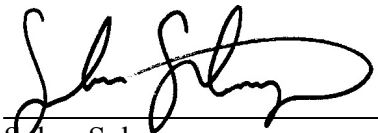

Suhas Subramanyam
Member of Congress