



**Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure**  
**U.S. House of Representatives**

Washington, DC 20515

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**Ranking Member**

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## **Government Watchdog Refutes Arguments for Air Traffic Control Privatization**

Dear Colleague:

President Trump, certain big airlines, and Republican proponents of privatizing our Nation's air traffic control system falsely claim privatization will speed up a program to modernize the U.S. airspace system called NextGen. **However, the truth is the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has made significant progress already in implementing NextGen.**

Last week, Dr. Gerald Dillingham, director of civil aviation issues with the U.S. Government Accountability Office, briefed Democratic Members of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure regarding the FAA's progress in implementing NextGen. And from Dr. Dillingham's unbiased, objective studies and perspective, the FAA's NextGen efforts are more on-budget and on-time than privatizers would have you believe.

First, despite Republicans' and some airlines' unsubstantiated claim that NextGen is over budget, Dr. Dillingham reported that **the FAA's cost estimate for NextGen (\$20.6 billion through 2030) is well within the \$15-22 billion range estimated in 2007.**

Second, despite what supporters of privatization have said, **the FAA has already implemented numerous NextGen capabilities, including:**

- **100 percent of the aviation industry's 148 NextGen priorities for 2014-17.**
- **Data Communication, or "DataComm."** DataComm, a method for controllers and pilots to communicate via text message instead of by radio, has been deployed at 55 of the busiest airport control towers nationwide more than two years ahead of schedule and under budget. In 2016, more than 466,000 flights received clearances via DataComm, saving pilots time in receiving and verifying their flight routes. The FAA plans to implement additional DataComm functionalities in 2021.

- **More high-precision performance-based navigation (PBN) flight routes.** The FAA has told staff that there are about 20,000 PBN operations per day at the Nation's busiest airports. Dr. Dillingham reported that PBN procedures now outnumber conventional procedures that rely on ground-based radio aids. PBN flight routes have resulted in huge benefits and savings, including greater flight on-time performance and lower fuel consumption and aircraft emissions nationwide.
- **Wake turbulence recategorization.** This capability reduces extra spacing behind certain airplanes that leave invisible wake turbulence in the air behind them. FedEx alone estimated that this work has conserved 10.7 million gallons of jet fuel and improved capacity at FedEx's Memphis hub by 17 percent.
- **The network of 634 automatic dependent surveillance-broadcast (ADS-B) towers.** ADS-B, a GPS-based system for tracking airplanes in flight, will replace radar in 2020 and already is providing free traffic and weather services to general aviation aircraft, which are receiving these benefits today. Airlines, on the other hand, have been slow to equip their aircraft with ADS-B avionics. In fact, airlines asked for and received an FAA waiver to delay their equipage with precise ADS-B systems until 2025, delaying the FAA's ability ultimately to use ADS-B to permit airplanes to fly closer together.
- **Electronic flight strips.** Prototypes have been deployed in the Cleveland and Phoenix control towers, with a similar system in the Charlotte tower coming online on June 13. Electronic flight strips will be part of a new traffic management system that will put airplanes in sequence on the ground and in the air; this system will come online in early 2020 and will be the most advanced of its kind in the world. Additionally, electronic flight strips are already in use in the 21 en-route centers that control airplanes at high altitude (above 18,000 feet).

Privatizing the air traffic control system, as President Trump and Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Shuster plan to do, will turn NextGen into NeverGen, slowing down these and other programs and jeopardizing the \$160.6 billion in benefits that the FAA plans to deliver to airlines and other aviation system users by 2030.

For more information on [Dr. Dillingham's presentation](#) or how this controversial privatization scheme jeopardizes work already underway, please contact us or Alex Burkett, Democratic staff director of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee's Aviation Subcommittee at [alex.burkett@mail.house.gov](mailto:alex.burkett@mail.house.gov) or extension 5-9161.

Sincerely,



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