



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

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February 24, 2021

The Honorable Gene Dodaro  
Comptroller General of the United States  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street NW  
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Comptroller General Dodaro:

As the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) continues its work to implement NextGen, the complex set of interrelated programs and systems that will bring the air traffic control system up to date with 21<sup>st</sup> Century technology, Congress must remain cognizant of, and prepared to address, barriers to the FAA's ability to implement NextGen on time and on budget.

As the Government Accountability Office (GAO) previously reported in 2012 and 2015, the implementation of the NextGen program has seen cost increases and delays as a result of several factors including: additional, unanticipated system requirements work; insufficient stakeholder involvement throughout system development; underestimates of the complexity of software development; and unanticipated events, including funding decreases or work stoppages.<sup>1</sup> In November 2020, the NextGen Advisory Committee reported that the FAA had missed milestones for the implementation of some NextGen capabilities, including Performance Based Navigation and Terminal Flight Data Manager.<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has taken a devastating financial toll on the U.S. and global aviation industries, with passenger traffic dropping precipitously and Congress providing COVID-19 relief, which included a ticket tax "holiday" affecting the Airport and Airway Trust Fund. Although the Airport and Airway Trust Fund received an infusion of \$14 billion in general revenues to support FAA activities through fiscal year 2021, we must remain vigilant about the numerous further uncertainties regarding FAA funding, the disruption of air travel due to COVID-19, and other factors that could affect NextGen implementation.

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<sup>1</sup> See GAO-12-223 (Feb. 16, 2012) and GAO-16-198R (Nov. 19, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> See NEXTGEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE (NAC): NOV. 17, 2020, MEETING SUMMARY, available at [https://www.faa.gov/about/office\\_org/headquarters\\_offices/ang/nac/media/20201117\\_NAC\\_Meeting\\_Summary\\_Package\\_DRAFT.pdf](https://www.faa.gov/about/office_org/headquarters_offices/ang/nac/media/20201117_NAC_Meeting_Summary_Package_DRAFT.pdf).

Accordingly, we request that the GAO conduct a review that covers the following issues:

1. What is the status of the implementation of NextGen capabilities in terms of cost and schedule?
2. How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the implementation of NextGen capabilities, and what actions has the FAA taken, if any, to address any setbacks in implementation?

We appreciate your attention to this request. If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact [REDACTED] with the Subcommittee on Aviation, Majority staff, at [REDACTED], and [REDACTED] with the Subcommittee on Aviation, Minority staff, at [REDACTED].

Sincerely,



PETER A. DeFAZIO  
Chair



SAM GRAVES  
Ranking Member



RICK LARSEN  
Chair  
Subcommittee on Aviation



GARRET GRAVES  
Ranking Member  
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