



Highlights of [GAO-03-164](#), a report to the Aviation Subcommittee, House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

### Why GAO Did This Study

Aviation experts believe that building runways is one key way to address airport capacity issues and prevent delays that can affect the entire U.S. economy, but runway projects are often controversial and time-consuming. GAO was asked to examine how much time airports spend completing runways, what challenges airports and other stakeholders experience during this process, and what airports and other stakeholders have done to address challenges related to runway projects.

GAO analyzed the results of surveys from 30 airports on 32 runway projects and visited 5 airports in order to interview numerous runway project stakeholders.

The Department of Transportation agreed with GAO's characterization of the challenges associated with building runways and some of the initiatives taken to address these challenges. They did express some concerns related to GAO's analysis of the time airports spent or estimated spending in developing runways, and suggested that GAO acknowledge additional FAA efforts to improve the runway process. We believe that our approach was a reasonable assessment of the amount of time taken to build runways; however, we clarified our discussion about the length of time. We also added information regarding initiatives undertaken by FAA.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-164](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-164)

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Gerald Dillingham, Ph.D., at (202) 512-3650 or via E-mail at [dillingham@gao.gov](mailto:dillingham@gao.gov).

## AVIATION INFRASTRUCTURE

# Challenges Related to Building Runways and Actions to Address Them

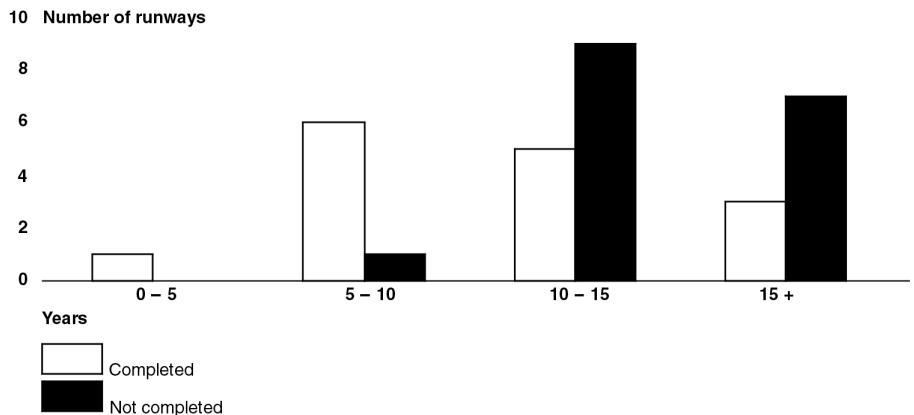
### What GAO Found

The amount of time airports spend planning and building their runways can vary because of numerous factors. In light of this variation, for the 32 runway projects we analyzed, we used median rather than average time. The median time was about 10 years for runways that had been completed and was estimated to be about 14 years for those not completed. Most airports and stakeholders we visited and surveyed said they faced a variety of challenges that had delayed their runway projects. While the level of challenges that airports faced varied in part depending on the proximity of the airport to a major city and the amount of community opposition to the runway, some common themes emerged, including challenges related to the following:

- Reaching stakeholder agreement on purpose and need for the runway;
- Completing the environmental review process;
- Reaching agreement on noise mitigation and other issues; and
- Designing and constructing the runway.

Although there may be no single solution to the challenges involved in developing runways, the federal government and airport authorities have undertaken a number of initiatives in this area. Recently, the President issued an Executive Order that is directed at streamlining the environmental review of transportation infrastructure projects, including runways. In addition, two federal legislative initiatives designed to streamline the runway process were considered in the 107th Congress. In addition, FAA has undertaken a number of initiatives directed at streamlining parts of the process. Airports have also undertaken initiatives in this area, including involving stakeholders such as community groups early in the process, and reaching early agreement on how best to mitigate noise and other runway impacts. These initiatives may be a step in the right direction, but it is too early to assess their impact on the runway process.

**Amount of Time Airports Spent or Estimated Spending to Complete Runways Varied**



Source: Airport survey data.