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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-06-653T](#), testimony before the Subcommittee on Aviation, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) effort to modernize the nation's air traffic control (ATC) system has been listed by GAO as a high risk program for more than a decade now, due to systemic management and acquisition problems. Two relatively new organizations housed within FAA—the Air Traffic Organization (ATO) and the Joint Planning and Development Office (JPDO)—have been given the bulk of the responsibility for planning and implementing these modernization efforts. Congress created ATO to be a performance-based organization that would improve the culture, structure, and processes and improve accountability in the ATC modernization program. Congress created JPDO, made up of seven partner agencies, to coordinate the federal and nonfederal stakeholders necessary to plan a transition from the current air transportation system to the “next generation air transportation system” (NGATS). This testimony is based on GAO's recently completed and ongoing studies of the ATC modernization program. GAO provides information on (1) the status of ATO's efforts to implement processes and other initiatives aimed at efficiently managing and modernizing the current ATC system and (2) the status of JPDO's planning efforts and the key challenges that JPDO faces in planning for NGATS.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-653T.

To view the full product, click on the link above. For more information, contact Dr. Gerald L. Dillingham, at (202) 512-2834 or dillingham@gao.gov.

AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL MODERNIZATION

Status of the Current Program and Planning for the Next Generation Air Transportation System

What GAO Found

ATO has made significant progress toward the efficient management of the nation's ATC system, but faces several challenges. ATO has implemented organizational and business process changes, and has taken steps to increase scrutiny of its acquisition decisions. ATO has met its acquisition performance goal for the second consecutive year—that is, 80 percent of its system acquisitions are on schedule and within 10 percent of budget. ATO has identified cost savings opportunities through consolidation of administrative activities and outsourcing. However, ATO faces several challenges, including sustaining and institutionalizing its progress toward operating effectively as a performance-based organization, hiring and training thousands of air traffic controllers, ensuring stakeholder involvement in major system acquisitions, and keeping acquisitions on schedule and within budget.

JPDO is making progress in its planning for NGATS, but faces several challenges. JPDO is implementing a number of practices that our work has shown facilitates the federal interagency collaboration that is central to its mission and legislative mandate. However, JPDO is fundamentally a planning and coordinating body that lacks authority over the key human and technological resources needed to continue developing plans and system requirements for NGATS. Thus, a challenge may arise in leveraging the resources of the partner agencies. As part of its planning, JPDO is working to develop a cost estimate for NGATS through a series of workshops with various stakeholders. JPDO has taken several important first steps and is following effective practices in developing an NGATS enterprise architecture—a blueprint for NGATS and one of the most critical planning documents in the NGATS effort. JPDO faces several challenges, including maintaining stakeholder support over the long term, defining roles and responsibilities and deciding how to coordinate the implementation of NGATS, and addressing several critical policy issues, such as the extent to which NGATS will accommodate visual flights versus instrument-only flights.

Air Traffic Management



Sources: GAO and PhotoDisc.