



Highlights of [GAO-03-473T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Aviation, House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Why GAO Did This Study

Much has changed since the Congress enacted the Wendell H. Ford Aviation Investment and Reform Act for the 21st Century (AIR-21) 3 years ago—the downturn in the nation's economy and the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, have taken a heavy toll on aviation. Competition for federal funding has also grown.

The reauthorization of AIR-21 provides an opportunity for the Congress and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to focus on several challenges to improving the national airspace system. These challenges include (1) funding planned airport capital development, (2) increasing capacity and efficiency, (3) implementing human capital and procurement reforms, and (4) ensuring aviation safety.

This testimony is based on ongoing and published GAO work. The information on funding and development, obtained from FAA and the Airport Council International (ACI), a key organization representing the airport industry, is preliminary and therefore subject to change.

What GAO Recommends

This testimony does not contain recommendations. However, GAO reports containing relevant recommendations are listed among the Related GAO Products following the testimony.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-473T.

To view the full testimony, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Gerald L. Dillingham at (202) 512-3650 or dillingham@gao.gov.

NATIONAL AIRSPACE SYSTEM

Reauthorizing FAA Provides Opportunities and Options to Address Challenges

What GAO Found

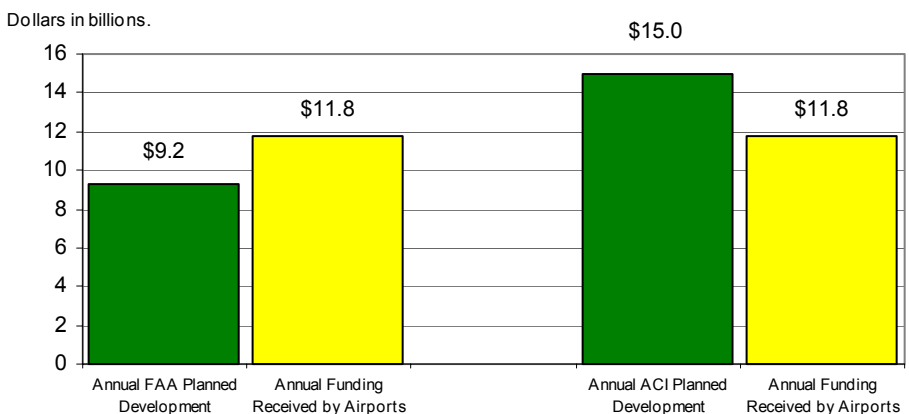
Funding planned airport development. Estimates vary as to the annual cost of planned airport capital development over the next 5 years, from FAA's estimate of about \$9 billion to the airport industry's estimate of about \$15 billion. If airports continue to receive about \$12 billion a year for planned capital development—the average for 1999 through 2001—they would be able to fund all of the projects included in FAA's estimate, but would fall about \$3 billion short of the industry's estimate.

Increasing capacity and efficiency. Recently, airports have taken about 10 years to develop runways, and ongoing runway projects are expected to take even longer. The federal government and airports have taken actions to expedite runway development, but it is still too early to assess the impact of these actions. FAA's management of costly air traffic control acquisitions has improved, but cost, schedule, and performance problems remain.

Implementing human capital and procurement reforms. FAA is making progress in implementing human capital and procurement reforms, but it has not fully implemented a new compensation system, in part because it has to negotiate with multiple unions, and it is not yet systematically evaluating the results of reforms in either area.

Ensuring aviation safety. The Safer Skies program, which focuses on identifying and correcting the causes of aviation accidents, and FAA's redesigned program to inspect airline operations are two important aviation safety initiatives. While both programs have made good starts, some challenges remain. The Safer Skies program, which began in 1998, is not fully implemented, and the inspection system has encountered startup problems with inspector training and guidance.

Past Funding Is Sufficient to Cover FAA's Estimate but Would Fall \$3 Billion Short of Industry's Estimate



Sources: FAA and ACI.