




Memorandum

U.S. Department of
Transportation

Office of the Secretary
of Transportation
Office of Inspector General

Subject: **INFORMATION**: Audit Announcement –
FAA’s Actions to Address ERAM Outages
Project No. 16A3001A000

Date: February 12, 2016

From: Charles A. Ward 
Assistant Inspector General
for Aviation Audits

Reply to
Attn. of: JA-10

To: Director, Audit and Evaluation

The Federal Aviation Administration’s (FAA) goals for modernizing the National Airspace System (NAS), such as increasing airspace capacity, depend heavily on the recently completed En Route Automation Modernization (ERAM) system—a \$2.7 billion program that replaced aging air traffic control hardware and software at facilities that manage high-altitude traffic. ERAM is expected to provide the infrastructure for a wide range of new capabilities associated with the Next Generation Air Transportation System (NextGen), such as enabling the use of satellite-based systems for navigation and surveillance, as well as data link communications for controllers and pilots.

In March 2015, FAA declared the ERAM system fully operational at all of the Nation’s 20 en route facilities. However, since controllers began using the system to control traffic on a daily basis in March 2012, the system has experienced a number of significant outages, most recently at Washington Center in August 2015. These ERAM outages have disrupted air traffic and resulted in hundreds of delayed and cancelled flights, impacting thousands of travelers and raising questions about the system’s stability and ability to support planned capacity-enhancing initiatives.

Concerned about these recent incidents, the Chairmen and Ranking Members of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and its Aviation Subcommittee, as well as the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, requested that we review FAA’s efforts to address them. The requestors also asked us to assess whether any tradeoffs were made to implement the system and their impact on ERAM’s ability to provide intended NextGen capabilities.

Consistent with these requests, our objectives for this audit are to (1) assess the causes of the recent ERAM outages and FAA's actions to address them, and (2) determine whether tradeoffs were made to ERAM's design requirements to meet revised schedules, and assess the delivery of new NextGen capabilities called for in FAA plans.

We plan to begin the audit in the next few weeks and will contact your audit liaison to schedule an entrance conference. If you have any questions, please contact me at 202-366-0500, or Nate Custer, Program Director, at 202-366-5540.

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cc: DOT Audit Liaison, M-1
FAA Audit Liaison, AAE-100