



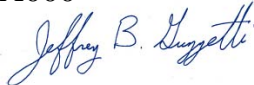
# Memorandum

**U.S. Department of  
Transportation**

Office of the Secretary  
of Transportation  
Office of Inspector General

Subject: **INFORMATION:** Audit Announcements -  
Reviews of FAA's Metric To Track Air Traffic  
Losses of Separation and Implementation of Air  
Traffic Safety Action Program  
Federal Aviation Administration  
Project No. 11A3011A000  
Project No. 11A3010A000

Date: May 11, 2011

From: Jeffrey B. Guzzetti   
Assistant Inspector General  
for Aviation and Special Program Audits

Reply to  
Attn. of: JA-10

To: Director, Audit and Evaluation

While the United States has the world's safest air transportation system, operational errors, which occur when a controller fails to ensure the required separation distance between aircraft, remain a significant safety concern. For example, on January 20, 2011, an operational error led to a near mid-air collision between an American Airlines plane carrying 259 passengers and 2 U.S. Air Force planes near New York City. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) statistics show that the number of operational errors increased over the past year, from 1,234 in fiscal year 2009 to 1,887 in fiscal year 2010. According to FAA, this increase is mostly due to the introduction of voluntary, non-punitive safety reporting, such as through the Air Traffic Safety Action Program (ATSAP).

In March 2011, the Chairmen and Ranking Members of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation and its Subcommittee on Aviation Operations, Safety, and Security as well as the Ranking Member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Aviation requested that we review FAA's process for reporting and mitigating the risk of operational errors. Specifically, they expressed concerns about the accuracy of the reported number of operational errors, the causes for the significant increase in this number, and the related safety implications. FAA recently implemented the System Loss of Standard Separation (LoSS) Index, a new process designed to capture each incident where

aircraft fly closer than separation standards permit.<sup>1</sup> However, it is unclear whether the LoSS Index will help FAA assess operational error risks or impact FAA's error statistics.

The Chairmen and Ranking Members also requested that we review FAA's implementation of ATSAP, which FAA established to encourage air traffic facility employees to voluntarily report safety and operational concerns. Specifically, they questioned whether FAA is using the program, how ATSAP impacts the number of operational errors reported, and if it is capturing errors that could lead to breakdowns in safety.

Accordingly, we plan to initiate two audits that will evaluate the following:

- The effectiveness of FAA's policies and processes for the new LoSS Index and whether FAA is using LoSS to (1) collect, measure, evaluate, and report separation losses and (2) mitigate those risks.
- FAA's implementation and oversight of ATSAP.

We plan to begin both audits the week of May 9, 2011, and will contact your audit liaison to schedule an entrance conference for both audits. If you have any questions, please contact me at (202) 366-0500, Scott Macey, Program Director for the LoSS audit, at (415) 744-0434, or Bob Romich, Program Director for the ATSAP audit, at (202) 366-6478.

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cc: FAA Chief of Staff  
Anthony Williams, AAE-001  
Martin Gertel, M-1

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<sup>1</sup> The new tool calls for the investigation and analysis of all separation losses, not just operational errors. Pilot deviations or miscellaneous losses such as emergency descent for pressurization are also included. Instances of non-compliance with separation standards will be called LoSS.