

Sean Duffy, Secretary
Budget Hearing – U.S. Department of Transportation

Rep. Ryan Zinke (MT-01)
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations

Deadline for Submission: Wednesday, May 21, 2025, at 5 PM EST

Tariffs Impact on Aviation

Question Background:

Mr. Secretary, As you know, aerospace is the last manufacturing sector in the U.S. where America exports more than it imports – resulting in a \$72 billion positive balance of trade last year.

Aviation is a model of what President Trump is working to achieve for other industries. Over 80 percent of a commercial airplane is made from American suppliers and workers, but with 80 percent of sales abroad to airlines in other countries. Additionally, most aerospace suppliers in the U.S. are small businesses with less than 50 employees.

However, the threat of reciprocal tariffs in Europe and China in particular may put airplane deliveries to foreign customers at risk. Despite announcing big sales, 80 percent of payment is received when by U.S. manufacturers when an airplane is delivered – not when the sale is announced.

Question:

The President's announcement of the \$10 billion in U.S. airplane exports in the US-UK Trade Agreement last week was a welcome and encouraging step and today's announcement in Saudi Arabia built upon that. What more can be done to ensure that airline customers in Europe, Middle East and Asia accept delivery of U.S. aircraft this year despite threats of reciprocal tariffs?

Question:

Mr. Secretary, it's no secret that the FAA has fallen behind other international aviation authorities in the speed it reviews and certifies U.S. aircraft, both due to personnel and process challenges. With UAS and EVTOL aircraft readying certification, including a significant number of U.S. aircraft and engines pending certification, what steps can this Administration take to improve the speed at which aircraft and aerospace parts are certified, while fully abiding by certification safety laws and regulations?

Question:

How does the speed of FAA certification compare to Europe and Canada? Are there processes or technologies they have adopted that allow them to certify aerospace systems at a faster or more predictable rate, without compromising safety standards?

Flight Safety

Question Background:

It would be really helpful if Members could get witnesses on the record reaffirming that it is safe to fly. Sec Duffy has been emphatic on this point in recent days and I am sure his comments will reflect that.

Question:

Mr. Secretary, we've heard a lot about equipment outages and staffing shortages plaguing our air traffic control system. Can you explain what redundancies and backups the FAA has in place to ensure that air travel remains safe despite these challenges? Can you reassure the American public that flying remains the safest mode of transport?

Question Background:

Montana has airspace around growing cities that are experiencing a diverse aircraft fleet mix of commercial airlines, military, firefighting, and other aircraft. Some of these congested airspaces lack radar coverage as a result of surrounding high mountainous terrain.

Question:

What measures will Congress take to improve radar and surveillance infrastructure in mountainous regions where gaps in coverage pose a risk to aviation safety and limit air traffic control effectiveness?

Question Background:

I am concerned not only about the spate of recent accidents involving aircraft but also by the number of "near misses." While the focus on buying new, upgraded and modern technology is admirable and necessary, the fact remains that most mishaps are traced back to human error. Rigorous training and adequate staffing will make a big difference, but you must employ AI-based technology that not only makes the human-in-the-loop better, but also compensates for that human's inherent weaknesses and the system's structural biases.

Question:

Who on your team is the point person for the development, procurement or acquisition of technology designed to identify, manage, and mitigate "human-in-the-loop" errors, which are a primary causal factor in most aviation-related mishaps?

Question Background:

I sense that there is developing a preference for one big fix to the system, a single, comprehensive solution. Given the two-decades experience with NextGen, that is troubling.

Question:

Who on your team is in charge of evaluating, acquiring and deploying existing Commercial Off the Shelf (COTS) software solutions that enhance safety now and help the human-in-the-loop do what they do best – make good decisions – solutions that can be layered in to the current system while you take the time it will take to build a new system?

Question:

Do you currently have an audit system to evaluate pilot experience when upgrading licenses that have hours requirements? For example, when a pilot claims to have 1500 hours, the hours threshold for obtaining an Airline Transport Pilots License, do you have any technology and data drive validation system to check pilot logbooks when upgrading these licenses?

Question:

When a pilot is involved in a mishap, do you have the ability to validate currency, experience, and the performance track record or do you take the log book at face value?

Question:

Do you have any systems that operate in near real time that determine if a pilot filing a flight plan has a valid medical and pilots license? If so, please explain that system and how you are able to ensure that pilots are not flying with expired medical certificates and licenses.

Question:

Additionally, how do you ensure that pilots are maintaining FAA mandated currency requirements for landing, instrument flight time, instrument approach types, and mandatory flight reviews?

Question:

What systems are in place to validate that a pilot is flying with the appropriate type rating when they file a flight plan? Who is responsible for validating that information prior to a flight?

Question:

If a pilot is charged with a DUI, drug conviction, or felony, do you have any process or technology that ensures that a flight plan will not be approved? Is it the pilot's responsibility to self-report?

Question:

Outside of a direct supervisor, when there is one present, do you have any technology to evaluate the communication performance of an air traffic controller with regard to procedural compliance? Is there a system to provide a track record of performance over time?

Question:

Outside of a direct supervisor, when there is one present, do you have any technology to evaluate the communication performance of a pilot with regard to procedural compliance? Is there a system to provide a track record of performance over time?

Question:

Do you have a system to evaluate performance of air traffic control performance in aggregate? For example, how does Los Angeles Tower compare to Reagan Tower with regards to communication clarity, consistency, and compliance with standard communication compliance?

Question:

What technology is being used to map communications of hazardous conditions between pilots and air traffic controllers? Are air traffic controllers taking hand written notes and passing that information along to pilots over the radio or is there a technology being used to streamline this process?

11-Why are ASRS reports able to be filled out and submitted by members of the public who do not currently hold a FAA pilots license? Why is there not a validation process to authenticate the credentials of that individual filling out that report? We know that ASRS reports are anonymous, but why are we not able to authenticate credentials prior to said individual completing the report before it become anonymous?

12-Why are ASRS reports not integrated with positional data and weather reports to ensure accuracy?

13-What technology is in place to identify the riskiest pilots and operators such that early intervention happens prior to a mishap occurring?

US Merchant Marine Academy**Question Background:**

Service obligated graduates of USMMA bring critical capabilities to U.S.-flagged commercial vessels, the Military Sealift Command, and as active duty and reserve officers in the Armed Forces. As one of our nation's five federal service academies, 100% of USMMA graduates have a federal service obligation. However, decades of underinvestment in staffing and infrastructure have placed the Academy at risk of losing its accreditation by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. According to the 2021 Congressionally mandated National Academy of Public Administration report, the greatest risk to USMMA's future is doing nothing to significantly address the longstanding issues that put the safety and health of the midshipmen and the entire USMMA community in peril. Current estimates to execute a full-scale modernization of the campus over 10 years is \$1.02 billion, and the USMMA Alumni Association and Foundation is seeking \$161 million for the first installment in FY26.

Question:

As a former Navy seal, I know the importance of the merchant marine for the sustainment of our troops deployed overseas. As Secretary of Transportation, you have the honor of leading and training the next generation of merchant mariners at the United States Merchant Marine Academy. Despite investment by this Subcommittee, the previous Administration failed to execute on critical modernization projects placing cadets in unacceptable academic and living conditions. When can we expect to see major modernization projects moving and will your full budget request include additional funding for capital improvements?

Essential Air Services/Rural Airports**Question Background:**

I understand why there has been a focus on airports in large metropolitan areas such as Newark. Given you are from rural Wisconsin, I would like to hear more about your plans for updating and improving rural airports.

Question:

What is DOT doing to get rural airports up to speed?

AM Radio

Question Background:

As you know, AM radio is a critical tool in several events that FEMA responds to in the lead up to wildfires among other disasters.

Question:

Do you agree that it is important to maintain AM radio as a safety feature in vehicles?

Protecting Aircraft Owners Private Information

Question Background:

As required by the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 (Public Law 118-63), the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) implemented Section 803 Data Privacy, that allows private aircraft owners to request to keep certain ownership information, like their name and address, private and not publicly available on FAA websites. This will have a negative impact to a variety of aviation activities including state aircraft registration fee collections, airport fee collections, FBO fee collections, and aircraft emergency search operations.

Question: Given that Section 803 of the 2024 FAA Reauthorization Act restricts access to aircraft ownership information, what legislative or regulatory remedies will Congress pursue to balance privacy concerns with the operational and financial needs of state aviation agencies, airports, and FBOs that rely on this data to assess and collect lawful fees?

FAA staffing cuts

Question Background:

The President has directed the FAA to take steps to reduce staffing of non-essential positions. This directive has resulted in numerous departures from key positions within the Helena ADO. Possible question: “Reduced staffing of employees classified as “non-essential” is impacting Airport District Office operations that focus on safety regulations, airport infrastructure projects, and communications with local airports.

Question:

What steps will Congress take to ensure that FAA Airport District Offices are adequately staffed to maintain safety oversight, manage critical infrastructure projects, and support airport operations, given the proposed personnel reductions in the FY 2026 budget?”