

FAA REAUTHORIZATION PRIORITIES

The future growth and competitiveness of America's travel industry depends on making the National Airspace System (NAS) more modern, efficient, and secure. This year's Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) reauthorization presents an incredible opportunity to confront staffing shortages and technology deficiencies. Without federal policy changes and investments to accommodate this growth, millions of Americans will experience more frequent flight delays, cancellations, long security lines, and air service reductions than ever before. Congress also needs to ensure the FAA has stable, sufficient, and reliable funding needed to achieve their mission.

According to the FAA Travel Forecast, over the next two decades, air travel demand is forecast to steadily grow at an average rate of 4.7% annually. Unless Congress acts to make the NAS more modern, dependable, seamless, and secure, the air travel disruptions experienced in 2022—including the first nationwide ground stop since 9/11—could become more frequent. While the U.S. is the world leader in aviation safety and performance, there is no question that we can, and must, do more. Travel businesses, travelers, and our nation's global economic competitiveness depend on it.

The U.S. Travel Association's platform for the next FAA Reauthorization bill focuses on policy changes and investments in key areas that can make air travel more modern, dependable, seamless, and secure:

WORKFORCE

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, the aviation industry experienced a shortfall in the workforce pipeline. New pilot certifications sharply declined, and pilot retirements increased, which exacerbated the pilot shortage. Congress should provide at least \$50 million per year for aviation workforce development grant programs, which will help increase the supply of qualified pilots and mechanics. Congress should also require the FAA to update the federal pilot training rules to provide more pathways to certification—including utilizing new technologies and increasing the mandatory pilot retirement age.
- In 2022, there were approximately 1,000 fewer certified air traffic controllers than a decade ago. During some of the busiest summer travel days in 2022, ATC staffing shortages contributed to spikes in flight delays and cancellations across the country. Congress should direct the FAA to update and modernize ATC staffing models to accommodate growth in air traffic demand and provide long-term funding to support increased demand for air traffic controllers for the next decade.

INFRASTRUCTURE

- Congress should rebalance the Airport Improvement Program (AIP) to ensure that large and medium hub airports—which handle nearly 90% of all passenger enplanements—receive a proportional share of the grant funding to modernize their airport infrastructure. Large and medium hub airports receive only a small portion of AIP grants because they are required

under current law to give back 75% of their AIP funding if they collect a passenger facility charge (PFC) of \$3 or more.

- Congress can rebalance the AIP program in the FAA Reauthorization bill by reducing the AIP entitlement turnback from 75% to 25% for medium and large hub airports that charge a PFC of \$4.00 or \$4.50. Furthermore, Congress should increase the annual AIP authorization above \$4 billion so that funding for small hub and non-primary airports is not reduced by the rebalancing.
- The FAA Reauthorization bill should also streamline the approval process for infrastructure projects at airports. The FAA regulatory process can take years to approve projects, which negatively impacts airports and travelers.

TECHNOLOGY

- The FAA Reauthorization bill needs to support technology advances at the FAA that will reduce travel times, delays and cancellations and improve the overall travel experience. Additionally, as the recent Notice to Air Missions (NOTAMs) outage showed, there is a need to update mission critical technology infrastructure and provide additional redundancies.
- Airlines have invested billions to equip their planes with NextGen technologies, such as ADS-B In. These upgrades help increase safety, can reduce flight delays in severe weather, increase NAS capacity, and make air travel more dependable. However, the FAA has been slow to implement the operational capabilities necessary to deliver the benefits of ready-to-go NextGen technologies and should work to operationalize these technologies.
- Congress must direct the FAA to accelerate the integration of Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) technologies and direct FAA to develop a transparent and certain regulatory process to operationalize AAM by 2024. The launch of AAM could transform passenger air travel in the U.S., reduce travel times, and increase connectivity for urban and rural destinations. Congress should prioritize establishing a 2024 deadline for FAA to complete its Special Federal Aviation Regulation (SFAR) for aircraft and operational certifications, while also making necessary infrastructure upgrades that allow AAM technologies to operate.

SUSTAINABILITY

- Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) is the only viable pathway to more sustainable air travel. While Congress provided foundational investments in SAF through the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), programs that support SAF production and delivery must be expanded as part of the FAA Reauthorization.
- The FAA Reauthorization should extend the SAF blenders tax credit through 2032. The bill should also extend the authorization and increase funding for the Fueling Aviation's Sustainable Transition through Sustainable Aviation Fuels (FAST-SAF) and Low Emissions Aviation Technology (FAST-Tech) grant programs