Time for Reform: Delivering Modern Air Traffic Control

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#ATCReform

Eno
Center for Transportation

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About the Eno Center for Transportation

Founded in 1921 by William Phelps Eno, inventor of the stop sign

Only think tank focused:
On all modes of transportation
Up and down the federalist chain
With public, private, non-profit sectors
Eno Aviation Working Group

Includes airlines, unions, general aviation, manufacturers, academics, former federal officials, others.
Air traffic control should be spun off from the Federal Aviation Administration.

It should be funded by user fees and be able to issue bonds for capital needs.

A range of diverse stakeholders must be part of its governance.
1. Why air traffic control reform matters today

2. The benefits of reform

3. What a new system should look like
American air traffic control faces 3 realities

- Technological challenges
- Political and budget uncertainty
- Federal procurement problems
Next Generation ATC

Current system is traditional radar surveillance, ground-based navigation systems, voice communications.

NextGen is a long-term initiative to transform to satellite navigation, automated position reporting, digital communications.
FAA has not “fully identified the total costs, planned segments, their capabilities, or schedules” of NextGen.

Failed to accurately and consistently measure the progress of NextGen programs.

Disappointing outcomes [due to] failure to improve operational efficiency and cost effectiveness.

5 out of 6 key NextGen programs delayed by 5 years on average.
Political and budget uncertainty

Mineta Commission (1997): ATC subjected to “too many cooks”

ATC subject to budget sequestration, government shutdowns, hiring freezes, expiring FAA authorizations

These factors increase cost and delay NextGen programs
Federal procurements procedures are lengthy and complicated.

In 1995 Congress gave the FAA flexibility to develop a new system; ended up with system not much different to the rest of government.

FAA procurement does not easily allow the agency to purchase “off-the-shelf” products, increasing cost.
1. Why air traffic control reform matters today

2. The benefits of reform

3. What a new path forward should look like
The Case for ATC Reform

Removes potential conflict of interest

Separates safety regulation from service provision

Enjoys broad support

Controllers—the ones who maintain safety—have seen that incremental reforms are not enough
The Case for ATC Reform

More stable and diverse financing

Not dependent on appropriations and uses tools the government does not have

Delivers modern infrastructure

Represents a major investment that won’t cost a dime to taxpayers
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ATC Reform Facts

Not about deconstructing government

Federal government retains oversight role
Represented on governance body
Allows FAA to focus on safety/certification

Will directly benefit rural communities

Enhances rural aviation network (e.g., virtual towers)
Represented on governance body

Not a corporate giveaway

Privatization ≠ a for-profit enterprise
Assets have been paid for by the travelling public already
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