

**Testimony of Peter J. Bunce**  
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**U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Aviation**  
**“America Builds: Air Traffic Control System Infrastructure and Staffing”**  
**March 4, 2025**

On behalf of the General Aviation Manufacturers Association (GAMA) membership, thank you for the opportunity to testify on this critical hearing “America Builds: Air Traffic Control System Infrastructure and Staffing”. We welcome Chairman Nehls as Chairman of the House Aviation Subcommittee as well as the new members of this committee. We look forward to working with Chairman Nehls, Ranking Member Cohen, Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Larsen, as well as all the other members of this proud and distinguished committee. While we face many challenges in aviation, we know this Committee, as it did with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Reauthorization Act of 2024<sup>1</sup>, will respond with true leadership and a focus on consensus and bipartisan support.

In the U.S., general aviation supports \$339 billion in total economic output annually and 1.3 million total jobs<sup>2</sup>, with GAMA companies having facilities in 49 states. GAMA members include more than 140 of the world’s leading manufacturers of general aviation airplanes and rotorcraft, engines, avionics, advanced air mobility aircraft, components, and related technologies. GAMA members are also providers of maintenance and repair services, fixed-based operations, pilot and maintenance training, and aircraft management companies. Industry

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<sup>1</sup> FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 (P.L. 118-63) May 6, 2024

<sup>2</sup> [Contribution of General Aviation to the U.S. Economy, PwC, February 2025](#)

activity takes place at more than 5,000 public-use airports, connecting small and medium-sized communities to air service across the U.S. and supporting businesses, jobs, and many diverse operations ranging from agriculture to law enforcement, fire, medical, and other emergency rescue services.

### **Industry Consensus on Air Traffic Modernization, Reform, and Staffing**

It is a pleasure to be here with you today to represent GAMA's views on the critical need for air traffic modernization. I am also very proud to be here with some of my industry colleagues who – representing commercial aviation, general aviation, manufacturing, labor, airports, advanced air mobility and other emerging technologies - have come together as a cohesive coalition of all the major U.S. civil associations and unions on a broad consensus of how to ensure that America has a safe, resilient, and modernized air traffic control (ATC) system in the future.

It is important to start by acknowledging some of the recent aviation accidents and extending our deepest sympathy to those who were impacted by these tragedies. While we do not know all the causes of these events, we applaud the National Transportation Safety Board and their employees for all their tremendous work in these investigations to understand the root causes of what occurred and then provide recommendations to make aviation safer.

The industry consensus on ATC modernization predates these terrible accidents and has been developed over the past several months, as all have recognized that the status quo funding that supports FAA facilities and equipment accounts is fiscally unsustainable and procurement practices currently employed by the FAA are unable to keep pace with rapidly evolving

telecommunications and aviation safety enhancing technology available today for both ground and airborne systems. What these tragedies have done however is highlight to the American people the importance of a safe, modern, and resilient National Airspace System (NAS) and they expect that the government and industry will come together to deliver on that expectation. We believe the time for strong, decisive action is now. Our organizations are ready to work with you to ensure the FAA is better equipped, staffed, and prepared to deliver economic growth and opportunity, foster American innovation, and continue to modernize the safest, largest, and most complex ATC system in the world.

Less than two weeks ago, Senator Cruz made a very powerful speech at the Aero Club of Washington. One sentence in particular stood out to me: “Each of you and the organizations you represent have a seat at the table and will be active participants in determining how to move the United States’ air traffic control system into the next era of aviation safety”.<sup>3</sup> I am proud to say that 34 of our nation’s leading industry groups, including all those here today, are actively engaged. We collectively sent a letter on February 19, 2025<sup>4</sup> putting forth our consensus position which, if enacted, would clearly meet Senator Cruz’s call for action.

The consensus priorities of our group and what we are asking this Committee, the Senate Commerce Committee, the Administration, and the rest of the U.S. Congress is to focus on the following five key areas:

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<sup>3</sup> [Senator Ted Cruz Speech to Aero Club of Washington, February 20, 2025](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Consensus Industry Letter on FAA Investments, February 19, 2025](#)

- 1) Robust emergency funding for critical air traffic control technology and infrastructure and controller staffing and training.
- 2) Direction to the FAA for achieving prudent divestment from legacy NAS elements and utilizing new and innovative procurement methods to facilitate the deployment of state-of-the-art technology.
- 3) Realignment and modernization of ATC facilities to improve operational efficiencies.
- 4) Additional financial mechanisms to more effectively utilize Airport & Airway Trust Fund (AATF) balances to enhance safety in the air and on the ground, including through multi-year budgeting.
- 5) Exempting the FAA from government shutdowns to remove their disruptive impacts on safety oversight, air traffic services, and the U.S. economy.

The letter also makes clear that our industry coalition is in total alignment “on not pursuing privatization of U.S. air traffic control services and believe it would be a distraction from these needed investments and reforms”. For me, this conclusion is derived from past experiences where all the time and attention on privatization proposals, has never led to any meaningful progress on tangible modernization efforts or in advancing critical work on infrastructure investment. Lost in these battles has been the practical and challenging part of finding more resources, changing the processes, and building the foundation for a better FAA to advance the operational efficiency and safety of the NAS. We should never allow ourselves to be in that position again. The time to act on these critical priorities is now! Rather than chasing think tank solutions, we must act decisively as industry and policymakers to deliver timely, meaningful, and

measurable changes. It is in this way that we can honor those tragically lost and make our aviation system safer for decades to come.

GAMA was very pleased that the Department of Transportation (DOT) Secretary Sean Duffy has made statements which appear to be generally aligned with our approach. In a recent Fox Business interview he said, “I think what you’re going to see is great investment here. Dems and reps want to upgrade the system. Everyone knows that it is a problem, and the upgrade hasn’t been done and if there’s an opportunity to make these upgrades and make them quickly, I think everyone’s gonna agree. We will have to spend more money- we are gonna need money. For upgrades but also controller hiring training and staffing. Cutting down the timeline for academy students.”<sup>5</sup> We applaud the Secretary for his announcement yesterday on efforts to boost controller staffing which begins to address these critical areas.

The wide industry consensus evident in recent letters is built upon the strong foundation of all the great, bipartisan work from the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024. The legislation took important steps in identifying and addressing the current challenges we face through provisions focusing on air traffic workforce hiring, training and staffing, requiring the FAA provide additional information about unfunded ATC system capital investment needs, developing an air traffic control realignment report to examine the consolidation or reorganizing of air traffic facilities and equipment as well as the management of airspace controlled by these facilities. We must now build on these successful bipartisan efforts, providing funding, financial flexibility, and implementation of other reforms to advance FAA management of the NAS.

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<sup>5</sup> [Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy on the FAA, air traffic control modernization | Fox Business Video, February 21, 2025](#)

## **FAA Leadership**

We approach this ATC challenge with a history of FAA introducing new technologies and establishing the standards for air traffic control technologies. The use of Automatic Dependent Surveillance–Broadcast (ADS-B) for air-to-ground surveillance originated in Alaska and has since been deployed across the continental United States and adopted in Australia, Canada, China, the European Union, and the United Kingdom. The safety of ADS-B enabled surveillance is core to today’s general aviation operators as well as other segments of the aviation system.

Similarly, the standards for navigation – so called “performance-based navigation” – were developed in the United States and then brought by the U.S. government to the world through the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). This shift in navigational capabilities relies on civil U.S. Global Position System (GPS) standards and the associated Wide-Area Augmentation System technology and benefits operators across North America. These benefits include segregation of traffic between airports and routes in close proximity; providing safe access to airspace near obstacles and terrain; improving access to airports during poor weather conditions, especially for general aviation operators; providing pilots with vertical guidance, resulting in more stabilized approaches and landings; and reducing flight track distances, fuel burn and emissions due to more direct flight paths and optimized vertical descents.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> [FAA Performance Based Navigation \(PBN NAS\) Strategy 2016](#)

Meeting this new challenge, under FAA stewardship and in collaboration with industry, will help ensure the continuation of U.S. innovation and global leadership in improving operational efficiency and the safety of air traffic.

### **Implementing This Consensus**

While there is broad support amongst many for moving forward with these investments, it is important to understand the benefits and outcomes they would provide for aviation safety and aviation access for all communities.

#### *Infrastructure: Focus and Funding*

The FAA's air traffic infrastructure is a vast network of nearly 350 air traffic control towers (ATCT) and terminal radar approach control (TRACON) facilities and 21 air route traffic control centers (ARTCC) plus thousands of technology nodes within the network. Federal funding has been used for the sustainment and modernization of this existing infrastructure, but this approach has failed to provide a reliable, stable source of funding to address the recapitalization of this infrastructure. All ARTCC buildings were constructed in the 1960's with an average age of 61 years. Other air traffic control buildings are also deteriorating and in general disrepair. Air traffic controllers should have safe and secure facilities to effectively manage and ensure the safety of air traffic.

Due to their size and complexity, many of the FAA's airport buildings require considerable replacement efforts. This recapitalization would be the first in FAA history and will require both the infusion of robust emergency funding and a stable and predictable funding source.

A strong infusion of emergency funding will allow us to begin to build the ARTCC, TRACON, and tower buildings of the future, encompassing the best of structural, technological, and safety enhancements that will host existing and new ATC technology.

The funding should also provide for expedited and strategic modernization of surveillance radars. The FAA maintains hundreds of radar systems and are a critical tool used by air traffic controllers to safely and efficiently manage air traffic. Our understanding is that all FAA radar systems are older than their original intended lifespan (20 years).

FAA radar systems provide safety critical information to air traffic controllers, including an aircraft's position and identity as well as weather information, all of which are vital to homeland security and national defense missions. FAA radar systems provide a backup to the more efficient and accurate ADS-B information, providing essential information in the event of GPS degradation or other frequency interference. As FAA radar systems exceed their intended lifespan, outages grow in frequency and duration, resulting in increased risk to the system and reducing operational efficiency. Investing in new radars will support improved performance, enhanced reliability, and compatibility with the latest air traffic management initiatives and vital national security efforts.

#### *Controller and Technician Staffing and Training and the FAA Workforce*

As I have spoken to this Committee on many previous occasions before, sufficient staffing and training for the FAA workforce is critical with certification personnel being GAMA's focus. But



meeting the workforce demands of a complex operation like air traffic is equally important. The FAA has not made sufficient progress on retaining or hiring and training controllers, and it must accelerate its work through expanded training capacity. The controller shortage is a challenge for the remainder of this decade and, if not addressed, threatens the efficient and safe operation of the NAS, impacting consumers and our economy. Additionally, NAS resiliency is threatened by the potential for large numbers of technicians eligible to retire in the near term.

GAMA appreciates and respects the work of all federal employees, especially those working to promote the safety, security, and the economic health of the U.S. aviation system. Our industry is one which relies on the professionalism, focus, and a safety mindset of all aviation employees, both in the public and private sectors. GAMA has been a strong proponent of ensuring that the safety workforce be physically located where they can effectively collaborate in person and develop their professional and technical expertise through on-the-job knowledge transfer and to enable timely decision making.

We clearly understand the need to improve the efficiency of FAA's workforce: however, it should be well-planned with a constructive objective and not come at a price of hindering or jeopardizing the progress that has been made, and which is needed to improve our aviation system now or in the future. When significant, unnecessary stress is imposed on any part or person in our extremely complex and interconnected aviation system, there can be unintended risks introduced that negatively impact the safety and resiliency of the entire system.

### *Consolidating Facilities and Acquisition Reform*

A key priority in the industry letter is the commitment to consider consolidating facilities and decommissioning outmoded and rarely used navigational aids that are not needed for safety. Modern telecommunications and computer technology allows for a realignment of existing facilities and the NAS technology platforms we rely on today. While we need facility recapitalization, it must be recognized that the scope of the replacement is so vast that consolidation must be considered as a key part of the solution; otherwise, these costs will dwarf even the most significant resources provided by industry and government for recapitalization.

Given the challenge, the Secretary and Congress should act to leverage stakeholder groups and independent experts to advise on the decommissioning or consolidation of installations and staffed facilities. Participants must include operators, labor groups, and manufacturers to make sure decisions utilize the latest technological advances and are sustainable in terms of user and employee support. It should also ensure that any decisions are cost-beneficial and consistent with national security considerations and operational continuity.

FAA also needs to improve its acquisition management system to reduce the time and cost of acquiring equipment and services. In 1996, FAA was given sweeping authority to design a new acquisitions system but unfortunately opposition from other agencies and bureaucratic inertia stopped its promise from being implemented.<sup>7</sup> FAA must break down the bureaucratic and

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<sup>7</sup> Department of Transportation and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 1996 (P.L. 104-50) November 15, 1995

inflexible acquisition processes it has put in place and take full advantage of the authorities granted by Congress to design and effectively implement a new system.

### Budget Reform

GAMA also supports the industry consensus that Congress should change the administration of the AATF to more effectively utilize the Trust Fund balance to enhance safety in the air and on the ground. This would bring the FAA's Facilities & Equipment (F&E) capital program more in line with the approach taken for other transportation programs like the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund, surface transportation contract authority, and the Airport Improvement Program which allow for more financial flexibility for upgrades and modernization with appropriate congressional oversight,

We recognize and acknowledge the important discussions about the broader budgetary pressures facing our nation. However, as you know, the aviation system is unique given the significant role it plays in our nation's economy through both the movement of people and goods throughout the country and the world. Moreover, users of the system primarily fund the operations of the FAA, airport improvements, and system technology and modernization through taxes submitted directly into the AATF. This change in budget treatment should be used to keep pace with the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century aviation system and should complement and leverage the emergency funding provided by Congress.

Further, Congress should consider giving FAA more flexibility to pay for long-term facility and technology upgrades through access to long-term capital funding. Current budget rules require FAA to pay for capital investments on a "pay as you go" by appropriations year approach and

changes in this area can be a vital element in helping to support the safety and efficiency needs of our national airspace.

### Funding Continuity

In 2019, I testified, along with Nick Calio, of Airlines for America, before this Committee at a hearing entitled “Putting U.S. Aviation at Risk: The Impact of the Shutdown.” In my testimony<sup>8</sup>, I highlighted the negative effects a government shutdown had on the agency from a GAMA perspective including impacts on certification activities, product validation, maintenance, pilot training, and other regulatory activities. These same risks remain today and would be exacerbated by delays to the implementation of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024, and most importantly, introduce additional challenges for agency leadership at a time where ongoing safety activities are at the forefront of public discussion. The negative effects on the FAA and industry start weeks before a potential shutdown as the FAA prepares for that contingency and then lasts far beyond the end of a shutdown as the FAA reconstitutes, resulting in disruptions that last for weeks if not months.

We hope Congress will pass a FY2025 appropriations bill for the FAA and DOT, and other agencies, as quickly as possible and avoid a shutdown at this critical time. In the long run, we urge Congress to look for ways to avoid this threat and provide certainty for the FAA, its employees, and the aviation system to function without distraction or interruption. Past efforts to achieve this have focused on leveraging the AATF for the critical operational, safety, and regulatory activities of the agency and we believe this concept to exempt FAA from government shutdowns continues to have merit.

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<sup>8</sup> [Subcommittee on Aviation Hearing Entitled "Putting U.S. Aviation At Risk: The Impact of the Shutdown" February 13, 2019](#)

### Organizational Changes within FAA

One critical FAA organizational change, created by last year’s FAA Reauthorization bill, was the establishment of the new Assistant Administrator for Rulemaking and Regulatory Improvement office. This office, reporting to the FAA Administrator and part of the management team, is designed to address key rulemaking challenges, improve coordination, and yield support for safety, innovation, and international leadership. It is our hope that the FAA follows through with the internal work to stand up this office and ensures the funding is available to fulfill this critical objective. Additionally, an FAA initiative or legislative language directing an ombudsman office to be created in the FAA to help applicants more effectively monitor agency progress on rulemaking and other activities involving industry applicants would also be welcomed.

In the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress, the Securing Growth and Robust Leadership in American Aviation Act, HR 3935<sup>9</sup>, proposed a new leadership structure at the FAA, consisting of the Administrator, a Deputy Administrator for Programs and Management (previously referred to as the “Deputy Administrator”), and a new career Deputy Administrator for Safety and Operations. The new career Deputy Administrator was designed to provide consistency and stability to the agency between Administrations, help reduce the likelihood of needing an executive from a Line of Business or Staff Office to perform the duties of an acting Administrator and help manage the increasingly diverse and complex responsibilities of the FAA. The new Deputy Administrator for

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<sup>9</sup> “Securing Growth and Robust Leadership in American Aviation Act” H.R. 3935, July 20, 2023

Safety and Operations was proposed to oversee and help manage the safety and air traffic Chief Operating Officer (COO) of the ATC system. While this provision was not included in the final bill, GAMA believes it continues to have merit and supports its inclusion in any future legislative efforts, especially given the events of the past few months which we believe show the importance of stability and continuity at time of agency transition.

### **Conclusion**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on how to build the ATC system infrastructure and staffing of the future and maintain U.S. leadership. It is a historic opportunity to work together to deliver the resources and reforms necessary to advance FAA management of the ATC system. GAMA stands ready to work with this Committee and the rest of Congress, the Administration, and industry stakeholders to seize this moment.

The time to act is now!