



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON  
**SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY**

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## Opening Statement

**Ranking Member Eric Sorensen (D-IL)  
of the Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics**

*The Federal Aviation Administration's Flight Plan: Examining the Agency's Research and Development Programs and Future Plans*

March 9, 2023

Good morning.

Before I start, I want to share how excited I am to be Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics. I'm pleased to be working with Chairman Babin, Full Committee Chairman Lucas, and Ranking Member Lofgren.

I am proud to be the son of an aerospace engineer who worked in aviation and the Space Shuttle program. So, this is in my blood. I grew up in Rockford, Illinois and took my dream job as a meteorologist – and of course, we all know, weather impacts everything. It is an understatement to say that I am excited to be here.

I want to welcome our new and Returning Democratic members of the Subcommittee. I look forward to working with all of you – and our Majority colleagues – on what promises to be a busy and important year for space and aeronautics policy!

Returning to our meeting, thank you Chairman Babin for holding today's hearing to examine the FAA's research and development programs. I want to welcome our distinguished panel of witnesses. Thank you for being here.

As Members of Congress who commute back and forth to Washington, D.C., often weekly, we depend on the safety and reliability of our nation's air transportation systems.

Thanks to the thousands of men and women at the FAA and its industry partners, the United States has maintained a strong safety record in commercial air travel over many decades. FAA's research and development activities are central to ensuring that safety.

Fire safety, aircraft icing, flight traffic management, and airport pavement are just a few examples of the research that contributes to the safety and success of U.S. commercial aviation.

It's important to recognize, however, that COVID-19 had devastating impacts on commercial air travel and our supply chain. While recovery is underway, the number of world total passengers in 2022 was still down by 29 percent as compared to 2019, according to the International Civil Aviation Organization—ICAO.

Today's hearing provides an opportunity to explore how Research and Development can help build resiliency into our national air transportation system. Commercial aviation is on the cusp of transformational changes bringing with it the potential for increased economic growth, jobs, innovation, and environmental sustainability.

Fully benefitting from these opportunities and ensuring U.S. leadership will require managing significant changes in an already complex National Airspace System—the NAS.

Emerging technologies like drones will be joining the skies alongside piloted commercial passenger airplanes. We need to make sure safety matches our technological innovations. In addition, the demand for lighter, quieter, more fuel efficient, and climate-friendly aircraft are leading to new aviation technologies, including biofuels and electrification.

I have confidence that the FAA, the U.S. aviation industry, and the nation's universities can successfully work together navigate the changes, if we give them the appropriate policy direction and resources to do so.

That is why today's hearing is so important. This Subcommittee will prepare the R&D title for this year's FAA reauthorization bill. Our discussion this morning will inform that work.

To that end, I'm looking forward to hearing from our witnesses on the following questions:

- Is FAA's R&D effectively addressing the challenges of integrating new and evolving technologies and systems into the NAS? What does FAA need to succeed?
- To what extent is FAA's R&D advancing U.S. leadership in sustainable aviation, reducing aviation's environmental impacts, and meeting the Biden Administration's target goals for achieving net-zero emissions by 2050?
- Do the FAA and its industry partners have the workforce needed to successfully lead the transformation in civil aviation?
- How can we build resiliency into our commercial air transportation system to mitigate the effects of unplanned stresses on the system?

I want to thank our witnesses, again, for being with us and I look forward to your testimony.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back the balance of my time.