
FAA Reauthorization Update: House Action Now Possible By Year's End

Shortly before the FAA's current authorization lapsed, Congress approved a six-month extension of the agency until March 31, 2016. Lawmakers gave themselves this additional time to address higher priority issues including a budget deal, raising the nation's debt ceiling, and a long-term highway funding bill. Those issues are in the process of being closed out and that means the FAA reauthorization will soon be front and center.

Those of you who attended NATA's recent 2015 Aviation Business Roundtable heard from Representative Peter DeFazio (D-OR), Ranking Member of the House Transportation Committee, who discussed the dynamics of the House FAA reauthorization process. Representative DeFazio informed us the House bill is largely drafted and discussed possible FAA management reform scenarios including Chairman Bill Shuster's (R-PA) proposal to create a user-fee funded, independent, not-for-profit corporation to operate the air traffic control (ATC) system and Rep. DeFazio's own reform alternative, a "21st Century Constitutionally Chartered FAA Corporation."

NATA is hopeful the House legislation will contain elements of the [policy recommendations](#) we provided lawmakers earlier in the year. The association was delighted that one recommendation, requiring the Government Accountability Office to look into the continued necessity for what we call the "fuel fraud" provisions that divert monies from the Aviation Trust Fund to the Highway Trust Fund, was added as a provision in the House version of the highway bill.

We expect the central issue of the upcoming FAA reauthorization debate, ATC reform, to resume being debated in a much more public manner. Recently, Delta Airlines announced that it was leaving its trade association, Airlines for America (A4A), citing among other issues its policy disagreement with A4A over ATC reform. In a speech last week, A4A President Nick Calio called on Congress to deliver "transformational reform of the system."

NATA recently met with the Chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee, John Thune (R-SD), who will draft the Senate version of the FAA reauthorization. Senator Thune anticipates House action before the end of the year and hopes to complete Senate action on its version of the FAA reauthorization before the March 31, 2016 deadline.

NATA continues to urge caution in terms of dividing the FAA and creating a user-fee funded, corporatized, ATC system. Radical change to the FAA's management structure and funding poses risks to the safe and stable nature of the world's best air traffic control system. It also contains significant unknowns to the operational costs to aviation businesses including access to critical airspace and airport improvement funds. These downsides, for general aviation and rural America as a whole, outweigh any potential benefits.

Be assured that NATA, in close coordination with our colleagues in the general aviation community, continues to educate key policymakers on the important issues in the upcoming debate. Depending on the specific language contained in the House proposal, we are prepared to launch an aggressive grass-roots advocacy effort, supported by all NATA members, to ensure general aviation's long-term interests are protected. So please keep your pencils sharp and be prepared to act.