



Highlights of [GAO-07-784T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Aviation, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The nation's current air traffic control system is reaching its capacity limits as demand for air transportation grows. The Next Generation Air Transportation System (NextGen) represents a new system that will use state-of-the-art technologies and procedures. Transitioning to NextGen will require the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to continue to sustain the current air traffic control system while acquiring new systems on schedule and on budget. In 2003, Congress authorized the creation of the Joint Planning and Development Office (JPDO), housed within FAA, to plan NextGen and coordinate the transition. GAO's testimony focuses on the progress FAA is making in implementing businesslike operations that could provide a foundation for managing the transition to NextGen, the status of JPDO's planning and facilitation of NextGen, and some key challenges that FAA and JPDO need to address in moving toward NextGen. This statement is based on GAO's November 2006 report and recent testimonies as well as ongoing work. GAO's November report recommended that FAA study its technical and contract management expertise and that JPDO take actions to institutionalize its collaborative practices. FAA and JPDO said they would consider our recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-784T.

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NEXT GENERATION AIR TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

Status of the Transition to the Future Air Traffic Control System

What GAO Found

During the last few years, FAA has made significant progress in implementing businesslike operations and procedures for managing and acquiring air traffic control systems. These operations and procedures have improved FAA's management of the current system and should better position the agency to manage the enormously complex transition to NextGen. One outcome of these changes is that FAA has reported exceeding its system acquisition goals for the past 3 fiscal years. However, further work remains to fully address past problems in acquiring systems and institutionalizing changes throughout the agency.

JPDO has continued to make progress in furthering its key planning documents. JPDO has experienced delays in the release of key documents, but currently plans to have initial versions of these documents released by July 2007. JPDO has been working since 2005 to establish a memorandum of understanding between its partner agencies, although as of May 4, 2007, the memorandum had been signed by the Departments of Transportation and Commerce and NASA, but was not yet signed by the Departments of Defense and Homeland Security. JPDO is also working with the Office of Management and Budget to establish mechanisms to identify NextGen-related projects across the partner agencies and consider NextGen as a unified, cross-agency program for funding decisions.

FAA and JPDO continue to face a number of challenges in moving toward NextGen, including questions about FAA's technical and contract management expertise; FAA's ability to maintain a number of existing systems, including monitoring and addressing equipment outages to ensure the safety of these existing systems as it transitions to NextGen; and conducting necessary human factors research. In addition, while JPDO recently estimated that the total federal cost for NextGen infrastructure through 2025 will range between \$15 billion and \$22 billion, questions remain about which entities will fund and conduct the necessary research, development, and demonstration projects that will be key to achieving certain NextGen capabilities. Also, JPDO faces a continuing challenge in ensuring the involvement of all key stakeholders, such as active air traffic controllers and system technicians, in its NextGen planning efforts.