

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-24-105254](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

NextGen is FAA's multi-decade program to increase the safety and efficiency of air travel by transitioning from a ground-based air-traffic control system that uses radar, to a system based on satellite navigation and digital communications. Through fiscal year 2022, FAA reported spending just over \$14 billion on NextGen. FAA projected that it would cost the federal government and industry at least \$35 billion through 2030.

GAO was asked to examine NextGen progress during the COVID-19 pandemic. Among other objectives, this report 1) describes FAA's progress in meeting NextGen 2018-2022 implementation milestones and how COVID-19 affected that progress and 2) examines the extent to which FAA's efforts to implement NextGen reflect program management leading practices. GAO focused on four critical stakeholder-identified NextGen program areas: navigation, communications, surveillance, and automation. GAO reviewed key NextGen plans, status updates, and performance reports. GAO also interviewed FAA officials and a range of aviation stakeholders to obtain diverse perspectives.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making four recommendations to improve FAA's management of NextGen. These address five leading practices and include (1) updating NextGen's life-cycle cost estimate and using it to measure performance, and (2) developing a detailed risk mitigation plan to help address challenges to NextGen implementation. FAA concurred with the recommendations.

View [GAO-24-105254](#). For more information, contact Heather Krause at (202) 512-2834 or krauseh@gao.gov.

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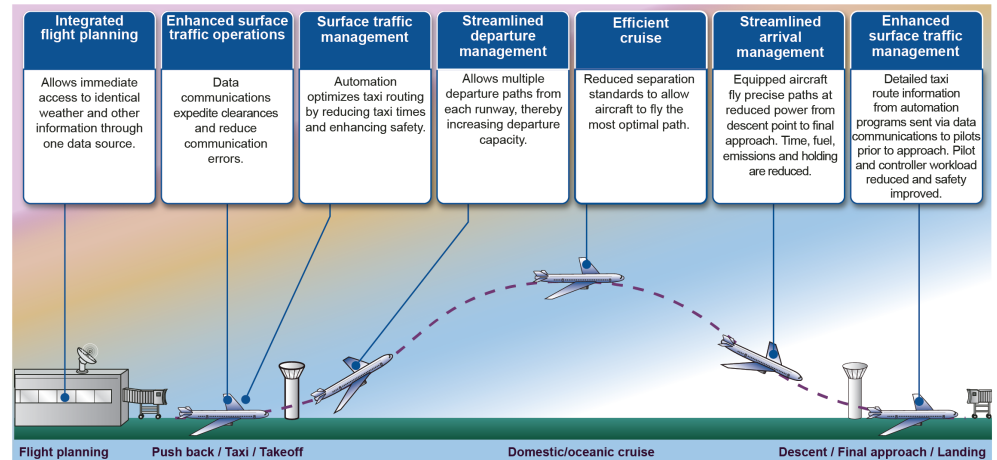
AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL MODERNIZATION

Program Management Improvements Could Help FAA Address NextGen Delays and Challenges

What GAO Found

Since 2018, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) made mixed progress meeting milestones in its ongoing effort to modernize air traffic management, known as the Next Generation Air Transportation System (NextGen). This mixed progress, across four critical program areas, has slowed FAA's NextGen efforts to improve the safety and efficiency of air travel and address growing congestion in the national airspace. For example, FAA beat its milestone for deploying more reliable digital communication services at air traffic control towers. However, it did not deploy initial services to all 20 facilities serving en route flights by its September 2021 milestone. As of August 2023, FAA had not completed the deployment of those services at eight en route facilities. FAA also extended milestones for systems to improve flight spacing and sequencing. FAA reported that COVID-19 played a large part in missed milestones, delaying, for example, system testing and training.

Expected Improvements under the Next Generation Air Transportation System



Source: GAO analysis of FAA information. | GAO-24-105254

FAA's efforts to implement NextGen fully or substantially met four leading practices for program management. For example, FAA has a lessons learned database and a program roadmap in line with these practices. However, closer adherence to five other practices could better position the agency to manage the program. For example, the agency has not updated NextGen life-cycle cost estimates since 2017. Doing so could help FAA better assess budget needs and refine annual budget requests, as well as measure its performance against the life-cycle cost estimate. In addition, FAA does not have a NextGen risk mitigation plan that identifies and prioritizes the highest programmatic risks or contains detailed risk alternatives analyses to mitigate identified risks. Such a plan could better equip FAA in its efforts to address the greatest risks and challenges to NextGen.