What GAO Found

JPDO has made substantial progress in planning NextGen, but continues to face several challenges. JPDO has established a framework to facilitate federal interagency collaboration and is involving nonfederal stakeholders in its planning efforts. JPDO has begun leveraging the resources of its partner agencies and is finalizing key planning documents such as the concept of operations and the enterprise architecture. The draft concept of operations has been posted to JPDO’s Web site for public comment and the enterprise architecture is expected to be completed in the next few months. JPDO and FAA have improved their collaboration and coordination by expanding and revamping FAA’s Operational Evolution Plan—renamed the Operational Evolution Partnership—which is intended to provide an implementation plan for FAA for NextGen. Among the challenges JPDO faces are institutionalizing the interagency collaboration that is so central to its mission, developing a comprehensive cost estimate, and addressing potential gaps in research and development for NextGen.

In transitioning to NextGen, FAA faces several challenges. Although FAA has taken several actions to improve its management of current air traffic control modernization efforts, institutionalizing these improvements will require continued strong leadership, particularly since the agency will have lost two of its key agents for change by September 2007. Costs are another challenge facing FAA as it addresses the resource demands that NextGen will likely pose, while continuing to maintain the current air traffic control system. Finally, determining whether it has the technical and contract management expertise necessary to implement NextGen is a challenge for FAA.