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The Honorable Ted Cruz
Chairman
The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Ranking Member
Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
United States Senate

The Honorable Sam Graves
Chairman
The Honorable Rick Larsen
Ranking Member
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
House of Representatives

Airports: Online Information Is Widely Available for General Aviation Fuel Prices but Not for Required Fees

Fixed base operators (FBO) offer services at airports—such as fueling, parking, and maintenance—for general aviation pilots and other users. These users often seek to obtain information about fuel prices and fees for FBO services before taking a trip. Although FBOs have discretion about what information they provide online, some pilots have raised concerns that it is difficult to obtain pricing and fee information online. Some pilots have argued this difficulty affects their ability to make an informed decision when selecting an airport.¹ In response, in 2018, groups representing pilots, aircraft owners, and aviation businesses developed “Know Before You Go” guidelines that call for FBO prices and fees to be more transparent.

The federal government’s role in FBO pricing is limited. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and Federal Trade Commission (FTC) do not have authority to prospectively regulate prices in the FBO industry or require FBOs to make pricing information available online.² However, FAA is responsible for ensuring that airport sponsors that receive federal funding from

¹In 2019, we found that some, but not all, FBOs make information about services and fees available online. GAO, *Airports: Information on Prices for Aviation Services and FAA’s Oversight of Grant Requirements*, [GAO-20-16](#) (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 26, 2019).

²In 2017, in response to concerns about FBO industry consolidation and pricing practices, FAA issued a Q&A that discusses, among other topics, that airport sponsors should disclose airport fees and make them publicly available in order to comply with FAA policy, although it does not specify how these fees should be made available. Airport sponsors may impose lease terms requiring an FBO to comply with these and other pricing policies. FAA, *Q&As – FBO Industry Consolidation and Pricing Practices*, ACO-100 (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 7, 2017).

the Airport Improvement Program comply with grant assurances.³ These assurances include obligations to ensure that FBO services and pricing practices are reasonable and not applied in an unjustly discriminatory manner.⁴ FTC has jurisdiction over private FBOs with respect to prohibiting unfair or deceptive practices and unfair methods of competition.⁵

The FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 includes a provision for GAO to review the efforts of FBOs to improve the online transparency of prices and fees for aviation users.⁶ This report describes (1) the extent to which FBOs offer information about fuel prices and fees for FBO services, (2) steps selected FBOs have taken to improve the availability of information online and factors affecting their ability to do so, and (3) selected stakeholders' views on the availability of this information.

To inform our work and identify the federal government's role in FBO pricing transparency, we reviewed laws and regulations related to airport grant assurances and unfair and deceptive practices. We interviewed FAA and FTC officials and requested information from them about complaints and investigations related to the availability of FBO fuel prices and fees.

To determine the extent to which FBOs offer information about fuel prices and fees, we conducted covert phone calls to FBOs, posing as recreational pilots, to obtain information about fuel prices and other fees. We compared the information that we obtained by phone with information that we obtained from online sources to see if the information matched. To identify FBOs for this review, we selected a nongeneralizable sample of 40 general aviation airports from FAA's list of National Plan of Integrated Airport System (NPIAS) airports.⁷ We included airports in the national, regional, and local categories to reflect the range of operations a general aviation pilot may experience. We excluded airports from the "basic" category, as many of these airports do not have an FBO. We randomly selected 30 airports to match the proportion of airports in the national, regional, and local categories of the NPIAS.⁸ We selected an additional

³An airport sponsor is any public agency or private owner of a public-use airport that submits an application for financial assistance under the Airport Improvement Program. 49 U.S.C. § 47102(26).

⁴Although FAA does not approve airport leases with FBOs, as part of a complaint or compliance review, FAA may review FBO leases or agreements to determine whether they are consistent with the airport sponsor's grant assurances. FAA may also investigate an airport sponsor's alleged failure to enforce lease provisions that require FBOs to charge only reasonable, and not unjustly discriminatory, prices for services. An informal complaint may be initiated under 14 C.F.R. § 13.2. Formal complaint procedures for FAA proceedings generally involving federally assisted airports are outlined in 14 C.F.R. Part 16. Under § 16.101, FAA may initiate its own investigation of a matter, including an airport sponsor's alleged violations of grant assurances, without having received a complaint.

⁵The Federal Trade Commission Act gives FTC broad authority to prevent unfair or deceptive practices and unfair methods of competition in most industries. 15 U.S.C. § 45(a). FTC may conduct an investigation or initiate an enforcement action against entities within its jurisdiction, including certain FBOs, if it has reason to believe that the entity is violating the law by engaging in an unfair or deceptive practice or unfair method of competition. In addition, the Department of Justice has a role in overseeing FBOs under its antitrust responsibilities to preserve competition.

⁶Pub. L. No. 118-63, § 750, 138 Stat. 1025, 1283-84 (2024).

⁷The NPIAS identifies existing and proposed airports that are important to national air transportation. See 49 U.S.C. § 47103. FAA categorizes general aviation airports on the NPIAS as national, regional, local, basic, and unclassified.

⁸We alphabetically sorted the list of all airports in the NPIAS and filtered the list to only include airports hosting general aviation activity in the national, regional, and local categories. We then systematically selected each 62nd entry from the list. We reviewed our selected airports to ensure we had similar proportions of airports to NPIAS in the three categories: national, regional, and local. We then removed any selected airports that did not have a functioning FBO and replaced these selections with another airport from the three categories, as needed.

10 airports in areas with special events occurring during the time of our audit.⁹ We used public sources to identify all FBOs operating at these 40 airports and successfully conducted covert phone calls to 45 FBOs.¹⁰ We compared fuel prices and required fees for a selected set of services for these FBOs from five sources: (1) AirNav, a free flight-planning website; (2) the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) airport directory, a free flight-planning website; (3) ForeFlight, a paid flight-planning website; (4) the FBO's website; and (5) phone calls to the FBO.¹¹ We selected these online sources because they were cited in preliminary interviews with knowledgeable stakeholders as sources that pilots commonly use to identify FBO fuel prices and fees.

To identify factors affecting the ability of FBOs to provide information about fuel prices and fees online, we interviewed corporate representatives from two national FBO chains. We also interviewed representatives of three FBOs from different regions (Western, Central, and Eastern United States).¹² In our interviews, we asked about factors that influence FBOs' decisions to provide information on fuel prices and fees online. We also interviewed representatives from all six of the industry organizations that supported the "Know Before You Go" guidelines: AOPA, Experimental Aircraft Association, General Aviation Manufacturers Association, National Air Transportation Association, National Business Aviation Association, and Vertical Aviation International. In addition, we interviewed the American Association of Airport Executives and Airports Council International-North America.

To obtain selected stakeholders' views on the availability of information about FBO fuel prices and fees, we identified a nongeneralizable sample of stakeholders to interview. We interviewed five pilots' groups, with at least one within each of three regions (Western, Central, and Eastern United States).¹³ We identified pilots' groups using AOPA's airports directory. We also interviewed the eight industry organizations listed above to obtain their views on price transparency. In total, we interviewed 13 stakeholder groups.

We conducted this performance audit from June 2025 to August 2026 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We conducted our related investigative work in accordance with investigation standards prescribed by the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency.

⁹FBOs sometimes impose special event fees during high-demand events, such as sporting events, regardless of whether the pilot attends the event. We selected some airports near special events because some stakeholders we interviewed raised questions about special events fees. The airports we selected included those near festivals, conventions, and sporting events. We also included an airport in the Mountain West during ski season. The airports were geographically dispersed across the United States.

¹⁰We made covert phone calls to all 48 FBOs operating at the 40 airports, but three of them did not answer our calls after multiple attempts.

¹¹Not all FBOs have required fees. For those that do have fees, these fees may include ramp fees or security fees. In some cases, FBOs waive these fees with the purchase of a certain amount of fuel.

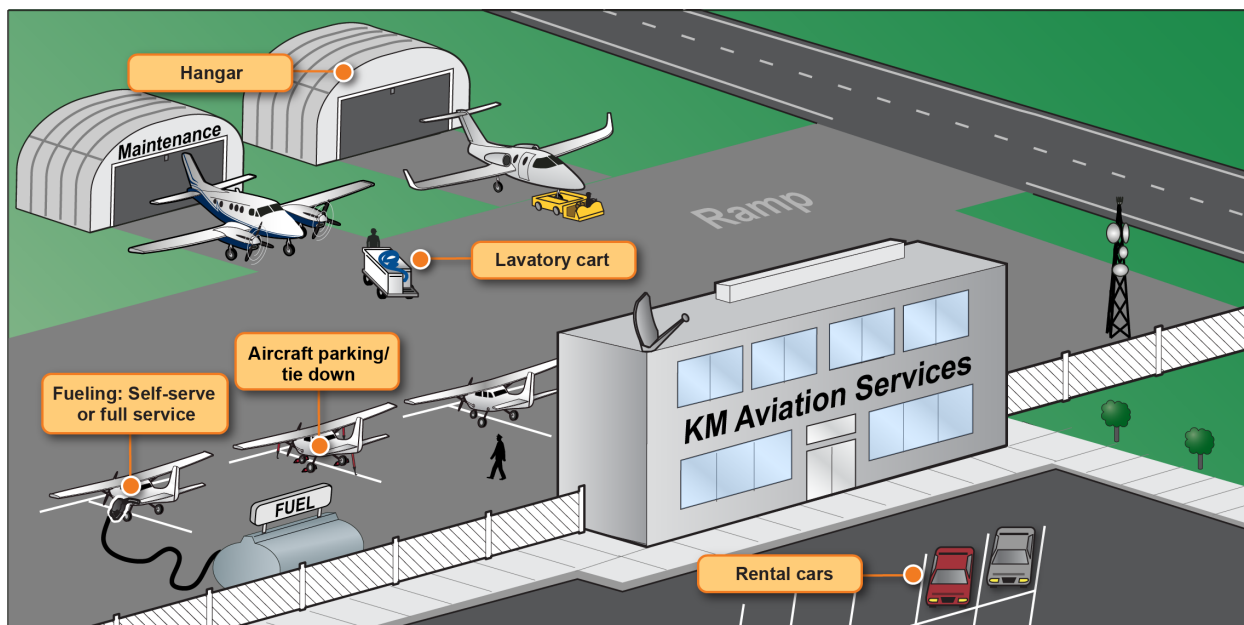
¹²We reached out to 13 other FBOs, and they either did not respond to our messages or declined to be interviewed.

¹³We reached out to 16 other pilots' groups and two groups of volunteer pilots for medical flights, and they either did not respond to our messages or declined to be interviewed.

Background

FAA defines an FBO as a business granted the right by the airport to operate fueling facilities, hangars, aircraft tie-downs, aircraft rental, aircraft maintenance, flight instruction, and other aeronautical services at the airport. In addition, FBOs sometimes manage parking ramps for aircraft and may charge a related fee for parking. The fees that FBOs charge for these and other services can vary by type of aircraft, and some fees may be required. (See fig. 1.)

Figure 1: Illustration of Fixed Base Operator Services at Airports



Source: GAO illustration. | GAO-26-108578

Some FBOs are private, for-profit businesses, while others are public entities affiliated with the town or airport authority that owns and operates the airport. Most airports available for public use have one FBO.

Fuel Prices Are Readily Available Online, and Information on Fees Is Limited Online but Available by Phone

Stakeholders we interviewed said pilots obtain information on fuel prices and fees for services from multiple sources, including websites and calls to FBOs, depending on the purpose of their trip. Representatives of four of the five pilots' groups we interviewed said they often fly to the same airports and are generally aware of the FBOs' fees at these airports. If they are flying to a familiar airport or doing preliminary planning, pilots said they may view the FBOs' website; AOPA's website; or applications, such as AirNav and Foreflight, to obtain fuel prices.

They said information available from these sources is typically accurate and up to date, but it does not always include prices for all the fees that an FBO may charge. All pilots' groups we interviewed said that if they are flying to a new airport or solidifying travel plans, their standard practice is to call the FBO to obtain information on fuel prices, fees, discounts or fee waivers, and parking availability, while gathering information about the airport, such as the condition of the runway. The pilots said they call the FBO directly because the information online may be vague, incomplete, or out of date.

From January through May 2026, we posed as recreational pilots to conduct covert calls to 45 selected FBOs to obtain information on fuel prices and fees, and we compared this with the information we obtained from online sources. We found that fuel prices are widely available online and generally match the information that we obtained through phone calls and that information on fees for FBO services is limited online but available by phone.

Fuel prices. In our review of the availability and consistency of fuel prices for 45 selected FBOs, we conducted covert calls and compared the fuel prices we obtained by phone with those we found on the FBO's website and three flight-planning websites. We found that

- for 14 FBOs, fuel prices were available on all four online sources we checked, and the prices matched those we obtained by phone;
- for 20 FBOs, fuel prices were available on some of the online sources we checked but not on others. For example, three of the FBOs did not have a website, and four of the FBOs had a website that was inactive at the time of our review. The fuel prices available online matched those we obtained by phone; and
- eleven FBOs had a fuel price on at least one online source that differed from the price we obtained when we conducted covert calls. Of these 11 FBOs, two had a price that differed by less than \$0.10 per gallon, seven had a price that differed by between \$0.20 and \$0.50 per gallon, one had a price that differed by \$0.85 per gallon, and one had a price that differed by more than \$1.00 per gallon.¹⁴

Fees for services. In our review of the availability and consistency of information on FBOs' required fees for services other than fueling, we found that these fees are not always listed online. Through covert calls, we found that 16 of the 45 selected FBOs stated that they have required fees for services.¹⁵ All 16 FBOs had required fees listed on at least one online source, but each FBO had at least one source that did not show required fee amounts, showed inconsistent information on fees, or was different from the amounts we were told on the phone. None of these 16 FBOs had required fees listed accurately on all the online sources we checked. The required fees missing from some of the sources included ramp fees ranging from \$11 to \$45 and facility fees ranging from \$10 to \$88.

Ten of the airports we selected were in areas where a special event was occurring. Of the 14 FBOs operating at these airports, one FBO told us over the phone that it was charging a special event fee, and the amount of the special event fee was listed on its website at the time of the covert call. However, this special event fee was not listed on the other online sources. Another FBO said during a phone conversation that it was considering adding a fee for an upcoming special event but had not yet determined the amount.

Some Selected FBOs Have Taken Steps to Improve the Availability of Information Online and Cited Factors Affecting Their Ability to Do So

¹⁴Fuel prices can fluctuate frequently, and online sources may not be updated immediately. According to iFlightPlanner, an online flight planning resource for pilots, in January 2026, the national average price for 100LL self-service aviation fuel (an aviation gasoline typically used by recreational users) was \$5.43 per gallon.

¹⁵Some of the FBOs we contacted have optional fees, such as for deicing or lavatory services, but we did not include these optional services in our review.

Representatives of some selected FBOs said they have taken steps to improve the availability of information online about fuel prices and fees for their services. These steps include the following:

- **Centralizing pricing across locations.** Representatives of two FBOs that operate at multiple airports said they have taken steps to set fuel prices and fees at the corporate level to maintain consistency across their locations and that they update fuel prices and fees centrally. Representatives of these FBOs told us that users can access pricing information for all locations on the FBOs' websites. According to representatives of these FBOs, information that is specific to a particular location, such as a special event fee, is available on the same website that lists their other normal fees.
- **Enabling online reservations and access to updated prices.** Two stakeholders said that younger pilots prefer to access pricing information online rather than calling the FBO. One large FBO recently launched a mobile application that enables users to reserve overnight parking or hangar space. This FBO also provides users with updated pricing and fees for services through its mobile application and via a weekly email to users who signed up for pricing alerts.

Representatives of selected FBOs and stakeholders we interviewed cited factors that affect the ability of FBOs to provide information on fuel prices and fees online and to keep that information up to date. These factors included the following:

- **Varied fees.** In addition to fuel prices and ramp fees, FBOs offer many types of services, such as lavatory cleaning and deicing. Representatives of two FBOs said they chose to limit online information to fuel prices and more common fees, such as ramp fees, that apply to more users. Some of these fees may be required. Further, they said some of these fees differ for each type of aircraft, making it more onerous to provide comprehensive fee listings online. For example, representatives of an independent FBO said the hangar fee ranges from \$75 per night for a single-engine aircraft to \$250 per night for a larger aircraft.
- **Customized fees.** Stakeholders we interviewed said that, while FBOs may publish retail fuel prices and fees for their services online, not all pilots pay the retail fuel prices and fees. For example, FBOs often waive or reduce some fees with the purchase of fuel or have loyalty and discount programs that personalize fuel prices and fees for some users. Representatives of two FBOs said that they would not be able to include all the customized pricing and discounts on their websites.
- **Dynamic pricing of special event fees.** Stakeholders said that FBOs may charge fees for special events to account for extra costs, such as additional staff needed to provide services, and that communicating these fees can pose challenges. Specifically, a representative of one FBO said that the FBO sometimes does not post special event fees online until right before the event because it uses a dynamic process based on supply and demand to determine the need for the fee, and the specific price. Likewise, representatives of one industry organization said that FBOs have an "on-demand" schedule, which requires them to be flexible to meet demand with limited resources during special events.
- **Challenges of updating online information.** Three FBOs whose representatives we interviewed have experienced challenges related to third-party websites that provide

information on prices and fees for FBO services. For example, representatives of a newer FBO said it replaced another FBO at an airport, but a third-party website would not update the FBO listing at the airport until it was notified by the prior FBO. Since the prior FBO no longer exists, the website has not been updated. Representatives of another independent FBO said that some third-party websites and applications reach out for updated fuel prices and fees for some services, but they do not always get the pricing right. In addition, representatives of one small FBO said that as a relatively new business, it does not have the staff to update some pricing information, especially fuel prices, which can change weekly.

Selected Stakeholders Cited a Few Concerns, but Pilots' Groups We Interviewed Are Generally Satisfied with the Availability of Information on Fuel Prices and Fees for FBO Services

Stakeholders we interviewed said the availability of information on prices and fees for FBO services has improved, especially for some of the larger FBO chains. However, three of five pilots' groups and five of eight industry stakeholder groups we interviewed cited a few concerns, including the availability of information on certain fees. Specifically:

- **Special event fees.** AOPA representatives said their members have raised concerns about the availability of information about prices and fees, particularly for special events. Similarly, National Business Aviation Association representatives said that the frequency and amount of special event fees at general aviation airports have increased and that their members who operate flights that use FBO services are confused about when and why FBOs charge special event fees.¹⁶ In addition, one pilots' group we interviewed said they were surprised by special event fees. One pilot expressed concerns about larger chain FBOs charging special event fees without notice or justification.
- **"Touch and go" landing fees.** Two of five pilots' groups we interviewed said they were surprised to receive a bill for "touch and go" landing fees—that is, landing briefly and taking off again without coming to a full stop.¹⁷ These pilots' groups said they had received invoices for landing fees from third-party vendors for each "touch and go" they performed.¹⁸ Although landing fees are an airport-imposed cost, two pilots we interviewed said that users view FBOs as the entities assessing landing fees. FBOs often collect landing fees on behalf of the airport and do not keep any portion of the funds collected.

¹⁶AOPA provided us examples of member complaints they collected over a 2- to-3-year period. Our review of the 26 examples AOPA provided found that three were related to price transparency, and the rest were related to prices. The National Business Aviation Association did not provide us with details for the complaints they collected, citing privacy concerns.

¹⁷Airports may charge landing fees for the use of airport facilities, so long as such fees are fair and reasonable and do not discriminate against aeronautical users or user groups. *Policy Regarding Airport Rates and Charges*, 78 Fed. Reg. 55330 (Sept. 10, 2013).

¹⁸Some airports have started using a third-party vendor to collect landing fees instead of an FBO. The third-party vendor automates airport landing fee billing using flight tracking data to identify aircraft and calculate charges. The vendor invoices aircraft owners, or the management company directly, for landings at general aviation airports, often weeks after the operation. "Touch and go" landing fees collected by third-party vendors are usually separate from fees charged by an FBO for services like fuel.

Nonetheless, the pilots' groups we interviewed said they were generally satisfied with the availability of information on prices and fees for FBO services and had never made a formal complaint to FAA or FTC regarding the availability of this information. These pilots said that information on prices and fees is available on websites, applications, or by calling the FBOs. The pilots who had experienced pricing disputes said they had resolved the issue after talking with the FBO.

When asked about the number of complaints filed and actions taken since the adoption of "Know Before You Go" guidelines, FAA officials said they were not aware of any formal complaints. FTC officials said they were not aware of any administrative actions or enforcement decisions related to the transparency of FBO prices.

Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report to the Department of Transportation (DOT) and FTC for review and comment. DOT provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate. FTC did not provide comments.

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We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Chairman of the Federal Trade Commission, the Secretary of Transportation, and other interested parties. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <https://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at GieseD@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Media Relations may be found on the last page of this report. In addition, Heather Halliwell (Assistant Director), Stephanie Purcell (Analyst in Charge), Josh Hatter, Thanh Lu, Dan Luo, Rebecca Morrow, Patricia Powell, Laurel Voloder, Malika Williams, and Elizabeth Wood made key contributions to this report.

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