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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-06-738T](#), a statement for the record for the Subcommittee on Transportation, Treasury, the Judiciary, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies, Committee on Appropriations, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

Over a decade ago, GAO listed the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) effort to modernize the nation's air traffic control (ATC) system as a high-risk program because of systemic management and acquisition problems. Two relatively new offices housed within FAA—the Air Traffic Organization (ATO) and the Joint Planning and Development Office (JPDO)—are now primarily responsible for planning and implementing these modernization efforts. Congress created ATO to be a performance-based organization that would improve both the agency's culture, structure, and processes, and the ATC modernization program's performance and accountability. Congress created JPDO, made up of seven partner agencies, to coordinate the federal and nonfederal stakeholders necessary to plan a transition from the current air transportation system to the "next generation air transportation system" (NGATS). This statement is based on GAO's recently completed and ongoing studies of the ATC modernization program. GAO provides information on (1) the status of ATO's efforts to improve the ATC modernization program, (2) the status of JPDO's planning efforts for NGATS, and (3) actions to control costs and leverage resources for ATC modernization and the transformation to NGATS.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-738T.

To view the full product, click on the link above. For more information, contact Dr. Gerald L. Dillingham, at (202) 512-2834 or dillingham@gao.gov.

AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL

Status of the Current Modernization Program and Planning for the Next Generation System

What GAO Found

ATO has taken a number of steps as a performance-based organization to improve the ATC modernization program, but continued management attention will be required to institutionalize these initiatives. ATO has adopted core values, streamlined its management, and begun to revise its acquisition processes to become more businesslike and accountable. For the past 2 years, ATO has met its major acquisition performance goals. ATO still faces challenges, including sustaining its transformation to a results-oriented culture, hiring and training thousands of air traffic controllers, and ensuring stakeholder involvement in major system acquisitions.

JPDO has made progress in planning for NGATS by facilitating collaboration among federal agencies, ensuring the participation of federal and nonfederal stakeholders, addressing technical planning, and factoring global harmonization into its planning, but JPDO faces challenges in continuing to leverage the partner agencies' resources and in defining the roles and responsibilities of the various agencies involved. JPDO could find it difficult to sustain the support of stakeholders over the longer term and to generate participation from some key stakeholders, such as current air traffic controllers. JPDO has taken steps to develop an enterprise architecture (the blueprint for NGATS) and will have an early version later this year. The robustness and timeliness of this enterprise architecture are critical to many of JPDO's future NGATS planning activities.

ATO has taken a number of actions to control costs and maximize capital funds, which will become increasingly important during the transition to NGATS. ATO has established cost control as one of its key performance metrics, developed a cost accounting system, and is using its performance management system to hold its managers accountable for controlling costs. ATO has developed a formal cost control program that includes, among other things, (1) conducting annual business case reviews for its capital programs, (2) decommissioning and consolidating ATC facilities, and (3) pursuing cost reduction opportunities through outsourcing. These cost control initiatives represent an important first step to improved performance but will require review and monitoring.

Air Traffic Control Tower



Source: National Aeronautics and Space Administration.