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Submitted to the

**Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure's
Aviation Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives**

Concerning

**Air Traffic Control Modernization and the Next Generation Air Transportation
System: Near Term Achievable Goals**

March 17, 2009

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you for holding this hearing dedicated to analyzing the opportunities for moving forward with Air Traffic Control Modernization and the Next Generation Air Transportation System, with a spotlight on Near Term Achievable Goals.

As you know I am President and Chief Executive Officer of the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA), a not-for-profit individual membership organization representing more than 416,000 members, which are nearly three-quarters of the nation's pilots. AOPA's mission is to effectively represent the interests of its members as aircraft owners and pilots concerning the economy, safety, utility, and popularity of flight in general aviation (GA) aircraft. Our members have a vested interest and will be affected by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) actions on air traffic control modernization; whether it is the ground system or equipment installed in our members' aircraft.

As pilots flying in the United States, we experience firsthand the safest and most efficient air transportation system in the world. This aviation network of 5,200 public use airports, complemented by the more than 13,000 privately owned landing facilities is a unique national resource. Each year, 170 million passengers fly using personal aviation, the equivalent of one of the nation's major airlines, contributing more than \$150 billion to U.S. economic output, directly or indirectly, and employing nearly 1.3 million people whose collective annual earnings exceed \$53 billion.

Air Traffic Control Modernization is Needed

While the aviation industry is currently experiencing an economic downturn reflective of the overall state of the national economy, this is an important time to prepare for an anticipated improvement and subsequent demand for air travel. AOPA believes that the Congress should require the agency to develop plans for the next five years that will help implement existing modernization efforts and lay the groundwork for others under development. It is also necessary for this Subcommittee to maintain a high degree of oversight to ensure that the plans continue to proceed.

AOPA has identified three modernization efforts that can be implemented in the next 5-8 years.

1. **Commit to 500 Precision Wide Area Augmentation System (WAAS) approaches annually** – An exciting example of a new technology that efficiently improves safety and enhances access to airports across the country is WAAS. This technology originally certified in 2003 is an example of a modernization initiative that is well underway, but not fully implemented. As of March 2009 the FAA had published 1,515 WAAS Localizer Performance with Vertical guidance referred to as LPV approaches that enable pilots to safely fly down to 200 feet making inclement weather access a reality at numerous airports. Because of WAAS, more than 340 airports are accessible with precision approaches for the first time, and 785 runways now support of all-weather access. In fact, there are now more precision WAAS LPV approaches published than the much more expensive Instrument Landing System (ILS).

However, more WAAS approaches are needed, and the FAA develop 500 WAAS

approaches per year, many more communities will have improved access to the aviation system.

2. **Modify procedures and policies to improve GPS use for navigation --** The FAA has greatly enhanced navigation by enabling pilots to use the Global Positioning System (GPS) and WAAS. However, pilots flying throughout the country continue to be assigned routes and clearances that follow the zigzag ground path of the 1960's and 1970's ground based navigation systems such as Very High Frequency Omni Range (VOR). This is inefficient, wasting time and increasing fuel consumption.

The FAA now needs to finish transforming today's low-altitude en-route airspace system so that GPS point-to-point navigation can be achieved throughout the entire country. This includes the publication of low-altitude airways through congested airspace and a much greater use of direct-to navigation. Navigation along the east coast of the United States remains largely as it was two decades ago, and the voluntary equipage by general aviation could be more fully utilized with a comprehensive overhaul of routes flown by our membership. In addition, pilots should not be required to rely on VORs or other ground based navigation for departure from general aviation airports.

As an example, at some airports pilots must file a first navigation point after departure to a VOR which is sometimes in the opposite direction than they want to fly. Meanwhile, a pilot could bypass GPS waypoints that could align more closely with their desired route of flight. The FAA should design new, easy to use departures that can be flown using a GPS and that offer multiple departure directions. Finalizing the transition of our airspace so that it fully supports GPS navigation will deliver the added benefits that motivates pilots to continue their voluntarily transition to satellite navigation.

3. **Identify and implement incentives that encourage ADS-B adoption and equipage --** For the longer term, Automatic Dependant Surveillance-Broadcast (ADS-B) will require extensive investments in ground and airborne equipment as the FAA shifts from a ground based radar system, to one relying on GPS and ADS-B transmitters installed in aircraft. Unfortunately, ADS-B does not share the same good news equipage story associated with GPS navigation. Instead, our members tell us that ADS-B incentives are difficult to identify and the investment costs are excessive.

The FAA must define an acceptable approach to move ahead, one that addresses the benefits, costs and the schedule for the future. As you know from our previous testimony during the economic recovery efforts, one near term way to facilitate this would be for Congress to approve a pilot program that provides for reimbursement or tax incentives to aircraft owners for ADS-B equipment installations on aircraft involved in evaluations and demonstrations.

The FAA can also take steps to increase general aviation pilot access to the services and information enabled with ADS-B. The current FAA plan is to provide ADS-B services in the same geographical footprint as today's radar coverage. As you are

likely aware, thousands of general aviation airports are outside radar coverage, and may never benefit from ADS-B unless this strategy is changed.

FAA / Aviation Industry Air Traffic Control Modernization Task Force Necessary

AOPA supports and is participating in the recent FAA initiative to create an industry Task Force to review Next Generation Implementation Plan, and identify areas of agreement on priorities. In the past, the absence of this type of planning has resulted in unresolved issues. We urge this Subcommittee to track the progress made by the task force and we ask that you consider monitoring the FAA response, to ensure that the \ recommendations are accepted and addressed. Because the Task Force is asked to look at the near-term and mid-term timeframe, quick action will be needed by the FAA, industry and Congress to remove any of the identified roadblocks and address the critical policy issues.

Air Traffic Control Modernization Has Limits; Airport Improvements and Adequate Airport Funding are also Critical to Aviation Growth

Finally, context is important when discussing Next Gen. Without a doubt, incorporating new technology will improve the air traffic control system, but it takes time and there is a limit to the amount of improvement and capacity enhancements that modernization brings. In fact, as I travel to general aviation airports across the nation, I am constantly reminded that airports are as critical to the aviation transportation system as on- and off-ramps are to our federal highway system. Federal airport funding should be no less than \$3.8 billion.

Repeatedly, I find communities enthusiastic about airport expansions that produce immediate jobs as well as renewed opportunities in the community for economic growth. My staff review news headlines across the country and the economic recovery funding is making a difference at general aviation airports, and is proving that Congress understands the value of local airports.

It is important to note that all of the new technology and capabilities will be underutilized unless pilots have a place to take off and land. America's airports foster air transportation and a discussion about modernization cannot be complete without an integrated plan for airport improvements

Conclusion

On behalf of the members of AOPA, thank you for your leadership in examining the need for action on the FAA Air Traffic Control Modernization. In the near term, there are many opportunities for investment in capabilities that set the stage for longer-term concepts and capabilities. Fully pursuing these air traffic control system upgrades in combination with a continued focus on our airport infrastructure enhancements ensures that the air transportation system is positioned well for the future.