



21st Century AIRR Act, H.R. 2997

FreedomWorks has released a key vote in support of the 21st Century Aviation Innovation, Reform, and Reauthorization (AIRR) Act, H.R. 2997.¹ The bill would reauthorize the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), the current authorization for which expires on September 30, for six years and modernize the United States' air traffic control (ATC) system.

The House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure marked up the 21st Century AIRR Act on Thursday, June 27, by a vote of 32 to 25.² Only one member of the majority, Rep. Todd Rokita (R-Ind.), voted against the bill.

Past efforts to reform the United States' ATC system have failed. Part of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2003, the Next Generation Air Transportation System (NextGen) was supposed to modernize the FAA's air traffic control system and make it more efficient. Instead, what the country has seen is implementation programs, delays, and higher costs.

Between FY 2004 and FY 2016, according to the Government Accountability Office, the FAA "received approximately \$7.4 billion for programs and activities FAA identified as NextGen."³ Department of Transportation Inspector General Calvin Scovel testified that NextGen could take 10 years longer to implement and that costs may reach \$120 billion, far higher than original estimates.

"The committee will well remember that the initial estimates from 9 or 10 years back called for \$20 billion in Federal investments, plus another \$20 billion in private investments, with a stated goal of completing implementation of the program by 2025. We are clearly not going to make it all by 2025, and we are clearly not going to make it with a total of \$40 billion in investments, Federal and private. We are probably looking years beyond 2025, perhaps another 10, even."
[...]

"And we are probably also looking at total expenditures in an order of magnitude

¹ Adam Brandon, "Support the 21st Century Aviation Innovation, Reform, and Reauthorization Act, H.R. 2997," FreedomWorks, July 13, 2017 <http://www.freedomworks.org/content/support-21st-century-aviation-innovation-reform-and-reauthorization-act-hr-2997>

² House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, "Vote on Ordering H.R. 2997, as amended, favorably reported to the House," June 27, 2017 <http://docs.house.gov/meetings/PW/PW00/20170627/106202/CRPT-115-PW00-Vote019-20170627.pdf>

³ Government Accountability Office, *Next Generation Air Transportation System: Information on Expenditures, Schedule, and Cost Estimates, Fiscal Years 2004 — 2030*, November 17, 2016 <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-17-241R>

two to three times that of the initial \$40 billion estimate to achieve the original plan.”⁴

The most recent audit of NextGen by the Department of Office of the Inspector General didn’t bring confidence that the FAA had gotten its act together.⁵ The six programs covered in the report had seen costs rise from \$2.13 billion in 2012 to \$5.77 billion, with implementation of two of the programs delayed by six years.

Clearly, Congress must move away from NextGen and to a more sustainable model.

The 21st Century AIRR Act would sunset the Air Traffic Organization (ATO) and transfer air traffic control authority to a newly created nonprofit entity, the American Air Navigation Services Corporation. (AANSC). The board of directors for the AANSC will be comprised of 13 stakeholders, including two directors appointed by the Secretary of Transportation and one director each appointed by the passenger air carriers, air traffic controllers, and commercial pilots.

The proposed reforms are similar to what Canada has accomplished. As the Competitive Enterprise Institute explained:

“Today, Canadian airspace users enjoy the most efficient and technologically advanced air navigation service provider in the world. Nav Canada has not raised user fees in 13 years and recently announced another permanent rate cut. As a result, the inflation-adjusted user fees charged by Nav Canada will soon be 45 percent lower than the aviation taxes they replaced. American airspace users deserve to enjoy the same benefits of modern air traffic control as our neighbors to the north and developed countries in Western Europe and the Pacific.”⁶

Several national conservative organizations – including FreedomWorks, Americans for Prosperity, the Coalition to Reduce Spending, the Competitive Enterprise Institute, and the National Taxpayers Union – have expressed support for the ATC modernization proposed in the 21st Century AIRR Act.⁷ Separately, several conservative state-based think tanks also support these crucial reforms.⁸

In addition to ATC modernization, the 21st Century AIRR Act would reduce regulation, promote safety, and improve service to passengers. Although there is room for improvement for every bill, FreedomWorks believes the 21st Century AIRR Act brings a long overdue series of reforms to the FAA. Conservatives in Congress should support this effort.

⁴ *The FAA Modernization and Reform Act of 2012: Two Years Later*, House of Representatives Subcommittee on Aviation, 113th Congress (2014) <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-113hhrg86586/pdf/CHRG-113hhrg86586.pdf>

⁵ Office of the Inspector General, *Total Costs, Schedules, and Benefits of FAA’s NextGen Transformational Programs Remain Uncertain*, Department of Transportation, November 10, 2016 <https://www.oig.dot.gov/library-item/33888>

⁶ Marc Scribner, “Reforming Air Traffic Control with the 21st Century AIRR Act,” Competitive Enterprise Institute, June 21, 2017 <https://cei.org/blog/reforming-air-traffic-control-21st-century-airr-act>

⁷ Pete Sepp, “NTU-Led Coalition to Congress: Protect Taxpaying Travelers,” National Taxpayers Union, June 27, 2017 <https://www.ntu.org/governmentbytes/detail/ntu-led-coalition-to-congress-protect-taxpaying-travelers>

⁸ Pete Sepp, “State-Based Groups, Scholars, Back New Course for Aviation,” National Taxpayers Union, June 27, 2017 <https://www.ntu.org/governmentbytes/detail/state-based-groups-scholars-back-new-course-for-aviation>