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## Memorandum

Date: June 20, 2018

Subject: INFORMATION: Audit Announcement | FAA Safety Oversight of Southwest Airlines | Project No. 18A3007A000  
Federal Aviation Administration

From: Matthew E. Hampton   
Assistant Inspector General for Aviation Audits

To: Director, Audit and Evaluation

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Safety is the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) top priority, including overseeing the safety programs of large commercial passenger air carriers. On March 9, 2015, FAA established requirements for all part 121<sup>1</sup> air carriers to implement a formal, top-down approach to managing safety risks, known as safety management systems. Under this approach, FAA and air carriers are to develop systems to identify hazards and implement corrective actions that mitigate risk. Specifically, air carriers must identify root causes for hazards and proactively manage risk to prevent accidents.

However, recent events have raised concerns about FAA's safety oversight, particularly for Southwest Airlines, one of the largest part 121 carriers in the United States. On April 17, 2018, Southwest Airlines Flight 1380 suffered an engine failure and debris penetrated the aircraft cabin, resulting in the first U.S. passenger fatality in over 9 years.<sup>2</sup> Preliminary reports indicate similarities with a previous engine incident that occurred on another Southwest Airlines aircraft during a 2016 flight, but it is unclear what actions the carrier took to manage the risk to prevent a future failure.

In addition, we recently received a hotline complaint regarding a number of operational issues at Southwest Airlines, such as alleged pilot training deficiencies, which raise concerns about FAA's oversight of the carrier. Specifically, we are concerned whether FAA's oversight includes an assessment of the carrier's ability to identify hazards and analyze and mitigate risks.

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<sup>1</sup> 14 CFR Part 121, Operating Requirements, Domestic, Flag, and Supplemental Operations.

<sup>2</sup> On February 12, 2009, Colgan Air Flight 3407 crashed outside Buffalo, NY, resulting in 50 fatalities.

Based on our analysis of the complaint, relevant documents, and FAA safety information, we are initiating a review of FAA's safety oversight of Southwest Airlines. Specifically, our objective is to assess FAA's oversight of Southwest Airlines' systems for managing risk. This review is separate from our ongoing review of FAA's oversight of aircraft maintenance.<sup>3</sup>

We plan to begin the audit later this month and will contact your audit liaison to schedule an entrance conference. If you have any questions, please contact me at (202) 366-0500 or Tina B. Nysted, Program Director, at (404) 562-3770.

cc: DOT Audit Liaison, M-1  
FAA Audit Liaison, AAE-100

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<sup>3</sup> *Revised Notification: Review of FAA's Oversight of Air Carrier Maintenance Programs* (Project ID 17A3003A000), May 9, 2018. OIG reports and announcements are available on our website at <http://www.oig.dot.gov>.