



Memorandum

U.S. Department of
Transportation

Office of the Secretary
of Transportation
Office of Inspector General

Subject: **INFORMATION**: Audit Announcement –
Review of FAA’s Oversight of Pilot Use of Flight
Deck Automation
Federal Aviation Administration
Project No. 13A3010A000

Date: February 21, 2014

From: Jeffrey B. Guzzetti
Assistant Inspector General
for Aviation Audits

Reply to
Attn. of: JA-10

To: Director, Audit and Evaluation

Advancements in aviation technology have changed the way in which commercial airline pilots perform their duties—from manually flying the aircraft to spending a majority of their time monitoring automated flight deck systems. Safety experts, such as the Federal Aviation Administration’s (FAA) Flight Deck Automation Working Group,¹ have expressed concerns that pilots rely too heavily on automated systems, which could erode manual flying skills. While flight deck automation allows greater precision and decreased pilot workload, recent accidents² demonstrate the importance of ensuring that pilots maintain their basic flying skills.

The current and former Ranking Members of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and its Subcommittee on Aviation requested that we evaluate the effectiveness of FAA’s oversight of pilot training for using and monitoring automation systems. Accordingly, our audit objectives are to (1) determine whether FAA has established regulations governing the use of flight deck automation, and (2) identify FAA’s process for ensuring that air carrier pilots are trained to use and monitor these systems while also maintaining proficiency in manual flight operations.

¹ Final Report of the Performance-based Operations Aviation Rulemaking Committee/Commercial Aviation Safety Team, “Operational Use of Flight Path Management Systems,” September 5, 2013.

² On July 6, 2013, an Asiana Airlines passenger jet crashed short of a runway at San Francisco International Airport during a clear day. The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) reported that the pilots were not fully aware of the airplane’s autopilot mode status during the approach. One month later, on August 14, 2013, a UPS cargo jet crashed while descending to an airport near Birmingham, AL, at night. NTSB reported that the autopilot remained on during the approach, and that neither pilot recognized the jet was too low until the last few seconds.

Our audit will include visits to FAA Headquarters as well as select Flight Standards Service field offices that oversee commercial airlines. We plan to begin this audit within the next few weeks 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 Nysted, Program Director, at (404) 562-3770.

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