The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is responsible for the safety and certification of all civilian aircraft manufactured or operated in the United States. On March 13, 2019, FAA issued a grounding order for the Boeing 737 MAX fleet after two accidents involving 737 MAX 8 aircraft—the October 2018 Lion Air crash and the March 2019 Ethiopian Air crash1—raised major safety concerns. After reviewing and approving Boeing design changes to the aircraft, new pilot training requirements, and additions to the airplane flight manual, FAA rescinded the grounding order on November 18, 2020, and the first domestic commercial 737 MAX flight post-grounding took place in December 2020.

At the request of the former Secretary of Transportation and members of Congress, our office has undertaken a series of reviews related to FAA’s certification of the 737 MAX 8 and its safety oversight.2 On June 29, 2020, we issued our first report3 to the FAA Administrator with detailed timelines of the certification process leading to the approval of the 737 MAX 8, and the subsequent FAA and Boeing activities between the October 2018 Lion Air and March 2019 Ethiopian Air crashes. The report also cataloged concurrent oversight

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1 On October 29, 2018, Lion Air Flight 610 crashed into the Java Sea shortly after departing Jakarta, Indonesia, resulting in 189 fatalities. Just 5 months later, on March 10, 2019, Ethiopian Air Flight 302 crashed shortly after departing Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, resulting in 157 fatalities, including 8 Americans.

2 On March 19, 2019, Secretary of Transportation Elaine L. Chao requested that we compile an objective and detailed factual history of the activities that resulted in the certification of the 737 MAX 8. We also received similar requests from the Chairmen of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure and its Subcommittee on Aviation; the Chairman and Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies; and Senator Richard Blumenthal.

3 Timeline of Activities Leading to the Certification of the Boeing 737 MAX 8 Aircraft and Actions Taken After the October 2018 Lion Air Accident (OIG Report No. AV2020037), June 29, 2020. OIG reports are available on our website at http://www.oig.dot.gov.
actions and events related to FAA’s Organization Designation Authorization (ODA) program and its role in the 737 MAX 8 certification. On February 23, 2021, we issued our second report, which included additional analyses of FAA’s processes for certifying the 737 MAX 8 aircraft and recommendations for FAA to improve its oversight of the ODA program.

This review will examine FAA’s actions following each of the two Boeing 737 MAX accidents, including grounding of the aircraft and its recertification. Accordingly, our audit objective is to evaluate FAA’s processes and procedures for grounding aircraft and implementing corrective actions, including for the Boeing 737 MAX 8.

We plan to begin the audit immediately and will contact your audit liaison to schedule an entrance conference. We will conduct our work at FAA Headquarters and the other sites as required. If you have any questions, please contact me at 202-366-0500 or Marshall E. Jackson, Program Director, at 202-366-4274.

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

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4 Federal law allows the Agency to delegate certain functions to private individuals or organizations through FAA’s ODA program, such as determining compliance with aircraft certification regulations.