

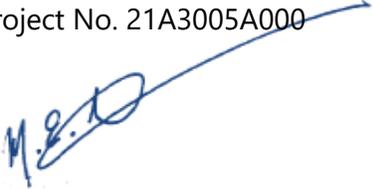


---

## Memorandum

Date: September 8, 2021

Subject: INFORMATION: Audit Announcement — FAA's Integration of Commercial Space Operations into the National Airspace System | Project No. 21A3005A000  
Federal Aviation Administration

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

To: Director, Audit and Evaluation

---

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) coordinates nearly 43,000 flights daily and manages approximately 5,000 aircraft in the National Airspace System (NAS) at any given time. In addition to commercial and military aviation, the NAS is used by the commercial space industry to conduct launch and reentry operations for transporting astronauts and supplies, placing commercial and scientific satellites into orbit and, recently, transporting civilian passengers into space. These operations are growing at an exponential rate. Over the past 5 years, FAA has gone from licensing about one commercial space launch per month to now licensing more than one launch every week.

Currently, FAA manages the NAS during commercial space activities by shutting down large portions of the surrounding airspace to protect commercial carriers and other airspace users from potential hazards. However, this results in increased operational inefficiencies and costs to these users, who must delay or reroute their flights. To reduce these impacts, FAA is developing the Space Data Integrator (SDI), a system that will integrate data from commercial space operations directly into FAA's air traffic control systems. SDI is expected to help FAA decrease the amount of restricted airspace needed for commercial space operations and the time required for the restriction, allowing for more efficient use of the NAS.

Citing the increasing frequency and complexity of commercial transportation launches and the need to effectively integrate these operations into the NAS, the Ranking Members of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure and its Subcommittee on Aviation requested that we examine the SDI program. This includes examining the system's existing and future capabilities, the timeline

for full utilization, and other actions taken and planned by FAA and the aerospace industry related to commercial space integration.

Accordingly, we are initiating an audit to examine FAA's integration of commercial space traffic into the NAS. Our audit objectives will be to assess (1) FAA's progress in implementing the SDI program and (2) actions taken and planned by FAA and the aerospace and aviation industries to integrate commercial space operations into the NAS.

We plan to begin the audit this month and will contact your audit liaison to schedule an entrance conference. We will conduct our work at FAA Headquarters and other locations as required. If you have any questions, please contact me at 202-366-0500 or Robin Koch, Program Director, at 404-562-3770.

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