Memorandum

Date: February 3, 2021

Subject: INFORMATION: Audit Announcement | FAA’s UAS Integration Pilot Program
Project No. 21A3001A000
Federal Aviation Administration

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

To: Director, Audit and Evaluation

The rapidly growing number of Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) (commonly known as “drones”) in the National Airspace System (NAS) presents a substantial opportunity for economic and technological development. It also poses one of the most significant safety challenges that the Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) have faced in decades. Recent FAA forecasts indicate that the number of UAS in the United States is likely to exceed 2 million by 2022, and FAA has already processed more than 1 million UAS registrations for commercial operators and hobbyists since 2015.

Recognizing that UAS is the fastest growing segment of the aviation industry and in response to an October 2017 Presidential Memorandum,¹ FAA initiated a 3-year UAS Integration Pilot Program (IPP). Through the IPP, FAA partnered with private sector (e.g., UAS operators) and State, local, and tribal government entities. The IPP’s goals were to accelerate the safe integration of UAS into the NAS and help DOT and FAA develop new rules to enable more complex UAS operations.

Participants tested, collected, and reported technical data to FAA on UAS challenges, such as package delivery and operations conducted beyond visual line of sight. However, when the 3-year program deadline of October 2020 was approaching, congressional representatives expressed concerns with a lack of clarity regarding the IPP’s overall program results and next steps. FAA ended the IPP as planned in October 2020 and then launched a new program called

BEYOND with eight of the nine original IPP participants to address remaining UAS-related challenges.

Citing the importance of the IPP’s efforts, the Ranking Members of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure and its Subcommittee on Aviation requested that we assess FAA’s IPP. Specifically, they asked us to evaluate FAA’s processes to foster communication and data exchanges with IPP stakeholders; efforts to assess participants’ risk mitigations; progress toward developing new rules, policies, and guidance; and next steps for a second phase, including goals and milestones.

Accordingly, our audit objectives are to assess FAA’s (1) results of the IPP and (2) plans for using those results, including how the Agency will incorporate them into its new program BEYOND.

We plan to begin the audit later this month and will contact your audit liaison to schedule an entrance conference. We will conduct our work at FAA Headquarters and selected IPP locations. 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