

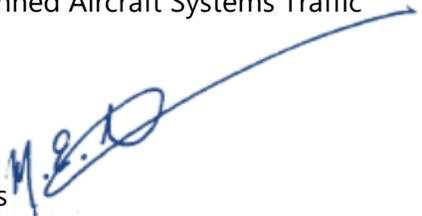


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## Memorandum

Date: March 29, 2021

Subject: INFORMATION: Audit Announcement | Unmanned Aircraft Systems Traffic Management | Project No. 21A3002A000  
Federal Aviation Administration

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

To: Director, Audit and Evaluation

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Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS), commonly known as “drones,” are rapidly growing in number in the National Airspace System (NAS). The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) predicts that by 2024, the number of small UAS (less than 55 pounds) used for commercial purposes will increase from 507,000 to 828,000 and that there will be nearly 1.5 million small UAS used for recreation.

Currently, there is only limited infrastructure available to manage small UAS operations in low-altitude airspace (below 400 feet) where FAA does not provide air traffic services. This poses a risk for accidents and incidents between UAS and other aircraft operating in the same airspace, such as helicopters. To mitigate these risks, Congress directed FAA to develop and establish a UAS Traffic Management (UTM)<sup>1</sup> system in collaboration with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to safely advance UAS integration.

As required by the FAA Extension, Safety, and Security Act of 2016,<sup>2</sup> FAA established the UTM Pilot Program in April 2017 to define an initial set of industry and FAA requirements to support low-altitude UAS operations. The FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018<sup>3</sup> further directed FAA to develop a plan for the

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<sup>1</sup> UTM is a traffic management system that would be separate from but complementary to FAA’s Air Traffic Management system. Under UTM, FAA would establish rules for operating UAS, and UAS-industry service providers and operators would coordinate the execution of flights.

<sup>2</sup> Pub. L. 114-190 (2016).

<sup>3</sup> Pub. L. 115-254 (2018).

implementation of UTM services that expand beyond visual line of sight. FAA completed its UTM Pilot Program in November 2020.<sup>4</sup>

Citing the importance of UAS traffic management, the Ranking Members of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure and its Subcommittee on Aviation requested that we assess FAA's efforts to develop and implement UTM, including the pilot program and any collaborations or interactions FAA has had with other Government agencies, including NASA and the Department of Defense. Accordingly, our audit objectives are to assess FAA's (1) progress with UTM development and implementation, including results of its UTM pilot program; and (2) collaboration with other Government agencies regarding UTM.

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 UTM test sites. 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

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<sup>4</sup> The UTM pilot program was a complementary effort to the UAS Integration Pilot Program (IPP), initiated in 2017 to help the Department of Transportation and FAA develop new rules to enable more complex UAS operations. OIG announced an audit of the IPP on February 3, 2021. See *Audit Initiated of FAA's UAS Integration Pilot Program* (Project ID: 21A3001A000), available on our website at <http://www.oig.dot.gov>.