



# Memorandum

U.S. Department of  
Transportation

Office of the Secretary  
of Transportation  
Office of Inspector General

Subject: **INFORMATION**: Audit Announcement –  
FAA’s Ability To Manage Air Traffic Control  
System Disruptions  
Federal Aviation Administration  
Project No. 15A3015A000

Date: November 5, 2015

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

Reply to  
Attn. of: JA-10

To: Director, Audit and Evaluation

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) operates a vast network of facilities and communications, navigation, and surveillance equipment throughout the United States for managing air traffic through all phases of flight. In recent years, FAA has been confronted with several system failures that have impacted air travel, inconvenienced passengers, and cost airlines and businesses millions of dollars in lost revenue. For example, on August 15, 2015, FAA experienced a problem with its En Route Automation Modernization<sup>1</sup> system at Washington Air Route Traffic Control Center, which disrupted air travel on the East Coast for several days. This disruption, as well as the September 2014 incident at Chicago Center,<sup>2</sup> underscores the importance of ensuring the operational integrity and resiliency of all air traffic control systems and the need for effective contingency plans.

In August 2015 the Chairmen of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure and its Subcommittee on Aviation raised concerns about the causes of recent disruptions and whether FAA possesses the ability to manage air traffic control crises that may arise within the National Airspace System. Accordingly, our objectives are to (1) assess the effectiveness of FAA’s operational contingency plans and the actions taken to mitigate the impact of recent air traffic control system

---

<sup>1</sup> En Route Automation Modernization (ERAM) is the computer system that processes flight and surveillance data, provides communications, and generates display data to air traffic controllers at FAA’s high altitude Air Route Traffic Control Centers.

<sup>2</sup> *FAA’s Contingency Plans and Security Protocols Were Insufficient at Chicago Air Traffic Control Facilities* (OIG Project ID AV-2015-112), September 29, 2015. OIG reports and announcements are available on our Web site at <http://www.oig.dot.gov/>.

disruptions, and (2) assess FAA procedures for updating operational contingency plans in light of recent events.

We plan to begin the audit this month and will contact your audit liaison to schedule an entrance conference. If you have any questions, please contact me at 202-366-0500 or Robert Romich, Program Director, at 202-366-6478.

#

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