Memorandum

Date: June 29, 2022

Subject: INFORMATION: Audit Announcement | FAA’s Oversight of Resiliency Planning in Airport Infrastructure Grant Projects | Project No. 22B3003A000

Federal Aviation Administration

From: Nelda Z. Smith
Assistant Inspector General for Aviation Audits

To: Director, Audit and Evaluation, Federal Aviation Administration

Extreme weather events and climate change effects can potentially cause major disruptions to airport infrastructure. Since 2010, the United States has experienced over 160 “billion-dollar” weather disasters—events that result in total damages exceeding $1 billion—such as severe storms, cyclones, flooding, and wildfires.¹ For example, in 2012, Hurricane Sandy caused widespread disruptions to the National Airspace System as power outages and flooding shut down the John F. Kennedy, LaGuardia, and Newark Liberty International airports. Additionally, the 2014 National Climate Assessment² found that 13 of the Nation’s 47 largest airports have at least 1 runway that could be vulnerable to a moderate to high storm surge or rise in sea levels.

In November 2021, Congress passed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA)³ authorizing more than $660 billion in transportation funding, including $15 billion to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) for Airport Infrastructure Grants (AIG). FAA plans to use the Airport Improvement Program’s (AIP) policies and procedures to issue and administer AIG for airport projects.

President Biden issued Executive Order 14008⁴ in February 2021, directing Federal agencies to develop plans to increase facility and operational resiliency to

² “Third National Climate Assessment: Climate Change Impacts in the United States,” 2014, U.S. Global Research Program. The U.S. Global Research Program is a Federal program mandated by Congress to coordinate Federal research and investments in understanding the forces shaping the global environment, human and natural, and their impacts on society.
⁴ 86 FR 7619, Tackling the Climate Change Crisis at Home and Abroad, February 1, 2021.
climate change impacts. DOT’s 2021 Climate Action Plan\(^5\) subsequently established a goal to ensure that projects supported by DOT grant and loan programs incorporate appropriate and effective climate change protective features. In addition, in November 2021, President Biden issued Executive Order 14052,\(^6\) which established priorities for agencies tasked with implementing IIJA and required them to prioritize resilient\(^7\) infrastructure projects that help combat climate change.

Given Congress’ and the Administration’s emphasis on IIJA funding oversight and aviation infrastructure resiliency, FAA faces new challenges in determining how to incorporate climate change resiliency into the AIG selection process. Accordingly, our audit objective will be to assess FAA’s plans for incorporating resiliency into IIJA airport infrastructure grant project selection.

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 other selected FAA offices and facilities as needed. If you have any questions, please contact me or Jay Borwankar, Program Director.

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

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\(^7\) IIJA defines resilience as “the ability to anticipate, prepare for, or adapt to conditions or withstand, respond to, or recover rapidly from disruptions.”