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*Office of Inspector General*

# *Audit Report*

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*Survey of Aeronautical Charting and Cartography  
Employees' Views of Proposed Relocation to TASC*

*Department of Transportation*

*Report Number: MA-1999-146  
Date Issued: September 30, 1999*





**U.S. Department of  
Transportation**

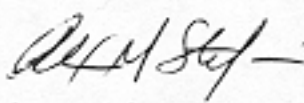
Office of the Secretary  
of Transportation

Office of Inspector General

# Memorandum

Subject: ACTION: Survey of Aeronautical Charting and  
Cartography Employees' Views of Proposed  
Relocation to TASC  
MA-1999-146

Date: September 30, 1999

From: Alexis M. Stefani   
Assistant Inspector General for Auditing

Reply to  
Attn. of: JA-40

To: Assistant Secretary for Budget and Programs

In response to an April 13, 1999 request from the Chairman, Subcommittee on Transportation and Related Agencies, Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives, we conducted a survey of current Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Office of Aeronautical Charting and Cartography (AC&C) employees. In Fiscal Year (FY) 1999, the Office of Management and Budget proposed transferring AC&C from the Department of Commerce to the Department of Transportation's Transportation Administrative Services Center (TASC). Congress specifically prohibited the Department of Transportation from making this move and included the funding for AC&C in the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) budget. However, AC&C remains a part of NOAA, funded on a reimbursable basis from FAA until a final organizational placement is made. Although the Department of Transportation has again proposed the transfer of AC&C to TASC, Congress has not yet completed action on the President's FY 2000 budget.

In his request, the Chairman expressed concern that the Department of Transportation's continuing efforts to move the functions of AC&C to TASC were causing fear and confusion among some employees. Further, the Chairman said many employees do not wish to move to TASC, and they had information on why this move would be detrimental to AC&C activities.

We conducted our survey during May and June 1999. We asked each of the 343 current AC&C employees to complete a written questionnaire addressing the proposed transfer to TASC. TASC developed a detailed transition plan for the potential transfer of AC&C that includes consolidation at a site in Prince George's County, Maryland. Plans for other alternatives, such as FAA, have not been developed. As a result, questions in our survey focused on the proposed transfer of AC&C to TASC.

Our questionnaire was reviewed and endorsed by the Director of AC&C and its two principal unions, and coordinated with the Department of Commerce Office of Inspector General. A description of our methodology is included as Exhibit 1 to this report. There was a high response rate to our questionnaire, as over 65 percent of AC&C employees responded (223 of 343). The questionnaire and a tabulation of the responses are included as Exhibit 2.

## ***Results-In-Brief***

Thirty-five percent of the AC&C employees responding to our survey were strongly opposed to the proposal to relocate AC&C to TASC. Conversely, 14 percent were strongly in favor. The remainder were relatively equal among moderate opposition (18 percent), moderate approval (16 percent), and no opinion (17 percent).

AC&C employees are concerned with job security. The principal disadvantages of moving to TASC focused on the potential loss of jobs that might occur due to downsizing or outsourcing of work. For example, the products of AC&C are provided to the aviation community at a price that does not cover the full cost of chart production. AC&C personnel recognize that a fee-for-service operation, such as TASC, must keep costs to a minimum, and this could result in a reduction in the size of the AC&C workforce. Forty-nine percent of respondents expected at least some loss of jobs upon transfer to TASC, while 28 percent expected their own job to be eliminated.

Employees responding to our survey also stated that uncertainty about AC&C's future is causing low morale. Morale was described as either moderately low (47 percent) or very low (19 percent) by 66 percent of AC&C employees responding to the survey. According to 47 percent of responding employees, the greatest factor contributing to low employee morale is uncertainty about AC&C's future.

Forty-six percent of respondents stated that the uncertainty about AC&C's future was disrupting AC&C operations to a moderate or great extent. Further, 33 percent replied that it was negatively impacting AC&C products and services. According to employees, the uncertainty about the placement of AC&C has created undue stress, evident through signs of burnout, fatigue, and increases in error rates.

Seventy-two percent of the respondents stated that other alternatives, such as FAA, should be considered since the mission and functions of AC&C may be more aligned with agencies other than TASC. This view is also held by the

Airline Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) which believes that a move to FAA is necessary to preserve general aviation safety and avoid an increase in chart costs. FAA disagreed with this position in a response to our September 1996 recommendation that AC&C be placed within FAA. The FAA Administrator at that time stated that some type of performance-based organization was a better alternative. The Department subsequently developed the proposal to transfer AC&C to TASC.

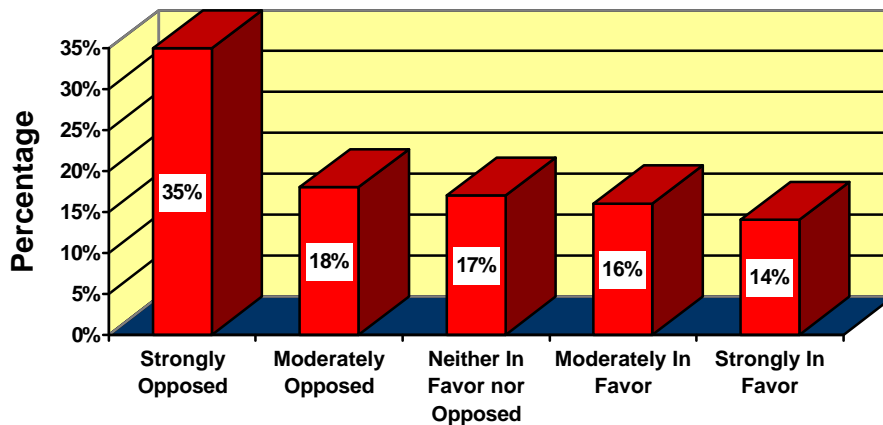
A decision on the placement of AC&C is needed to address employee concerns and ensure an effective transition from NOAA to the Department of Transportation. We recognize that the Department of Transportation needs to work with the Congress in this regard. A good portion of employee concerns are the result of uncertainty about where AC&C will be placed and when that decision will be made. However, even a prompt decision to move AC&C to TASC will not resolve all employee concerns. AC&C employees recognize that a fee-for-service organization, such as TASC, will make every effort to recover costs through fees and this could result in a reduction in the size of the workforce.

## *Findings*

### **Respondents Are Concerned With Job Security**

In total, 53 percent of respondents were either strongly opposed (35 percent) or moderately opposed (18 percent) to being transferred to TASC. Conversely, 30 percent were either strongly in favor (14 percent) or moderately in favor (16 percent) of the proposed transfer to TASC. The following chart shows respondents' opinions on relocating AC&C to TASC:

### **Opinion on Relocating AC&C to TASC**



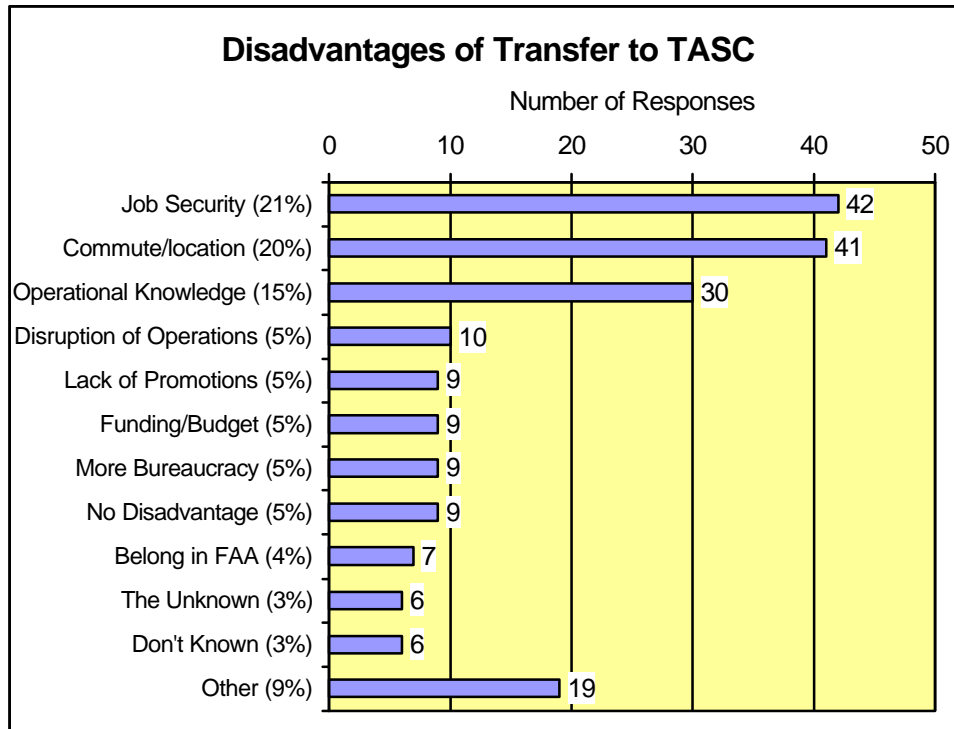
**Transfer may result in loss of jobs due to downsizing, outsourcing of work, or TASC's instability.** Employees expressed concern that TASC could contract-out AC&C operations to the private sector and eliminate or downsize work done in-house. Respondents stated that either situation could adversely affect the quality and timeliness of AC&C products and services. For example, the products of AC&C are provided to the aviation community at a price that does not cover the full cost of chart production. AC&C personnel recognize that a fee-for-service operation, such as TASC, must keep costs to a minimum, and this could result in a reduction in the size of the AC&C workforce. Thirty-five percent of respondents indicated that a transfer to TASC would result in some decrease in the number of AC&C jobs, while 14 percent stated the transfer would result in a substantial reduction. Additionally, 28 percent of respondents indicated that their own job would more likely (20 percent) or much more likely (8 percent) be eliminated upon transfer to TASC.

Respondents also questioned whether TASC would continue to exist in its current form. The Subcommittee on Transportation and Related Agencies, Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives, has questioned the need for TASC as an organization, in light of the ability of DOT Administrations to directly outsource for services. Employees view TASC as a relatively new organization that lacks a proven record of accomplishment, and could be easily abolished.

**The proposed location is inconvenient and increases commuting time.** Twenty percent of respondents mentioned office location as having a potentially adverse impact on them. Employees expressed concern that commuting times would increase and not be convenient for the majority of employees if AC&C moves to the currently proposed location in Prince George's County.

**Lack of operational knowledge would adversely affect the quality of products and services.** Respondents expressed concern that because TASC lacked knowledge of aeronautical cartography operations, the quality of products and services would suffer if AC&C were placed under TASC. Further, respondents indicated that because AC&C employees dealt with broad safety issues, they should not be placed with an organization that knows nothing about the importance of their jobs.

A summary of disadvantages cited by employees is shown in the following chart.



### **Employee Morale and Operations Are Adversely Affected**

Respondents stated that continuing uncertainty about the future of AC&C was having a negative impact on the employees, and the products and services that AC&C provides.

**Uncertainty has negatively affected morale.** The question concerning morale received the highest number of written responses to any of the survey questions. AC&C’s uncertain future is having the single largest negative effect on morale, as cited by 47 percent of the respondents. This response was the largest single concentration of responses to any in the questionnaire, indicating AC&C employees placed a very high level of importance on this issue and its cause. Sixty-six percent of the survey respondents indicated that AC&C morale was either very low (19 percent) or moderately low (47 percent).

**Uncertainty is causing stress and anxiety.** Eighty-three percent of employees responding stated that uncertainty was also causing anxiety among the staff, while 61 percent of the respondents indicated that uncertainty associated with the

pending relocation was personally stressful. Signs of employee stress reported by respondents included burnout, fatigue, and increases in error rates.

**Uncertainty is disrupting operations, products, and services.** Seventy-six percent of the respondents indicated that uncertainty about their future was disrupting AC&C operations at least slightly. Thirty-three percent responded that uncertainty was having a negative effect on AC&C products and services. Employees stated that this unstable environment is causing high-quality, experienced, and dedicated employees to leave AC&C, leading to additional workload on the remaining employees.

**Employees want a decision on AC&C's location.** Nineteen percent of respondents provided written comments on the lack of a decision on AC&C's future location. In their written responses, employees wanted a decision to be made on the proposed move to another agency and a timetable to implement the decision. Respondents also said that the uncertainty surrounding the AC&C move has taken a toll on its employees and a decision needed to be made soon or product quality and employee morale would continue to decline.

## **Respondents Indicate Organizational Alternatives Should Be Considered**

Regardless of their opinions on the move to TASC, respondents stated that alternatives should be considered. When asked which alternative should be considered, respondents cited FAA 43 percent of the time, even though no firm plans exist for this alternative and FAA opposed the transfer in 1996. Employees commented that as its largest customer, FAA provides the most funds for AC&C, and also furnishes the information for its aeronautical products. AC&C's primary function also shares the same aviation safety mission as FAA.

A September 1996 report<sup>1</sup> by the Inspectors General from the Departments of Commerce and Transportation, prepared at the request of the Office of Management and Budget, concluded that AC&C fit best into the mission of FAA. The report recommended transferring AC&C to FAA, where it was more closely associated through funding, aviation safety mission, and program direction. The FAA Administrator at that time disagreed with this recommendation, believing some type of performance-based organization was a better alternative. As a result, FAA did not complete any plans to move AC&C to FAA.

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<sup>1</sup> NOAA's Office of Aeronautical Charting and Cartography Should Transfer to FAA, Special Interagency Review Conducted by Offices of Inspector General, U.S. Departments of Commerce and Transportation, September 1996.

Organizations such as the Airline Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) are concerned that transferring the aeronautical charting function to TASC, a franchise fund organization, could result in their members paying more for the services. Currently, the products of AC&C are provided to the aviation community at a price that does not cover the full cost of chart production. AOPA has been critical of the Department for not considering a transfer of AC&C to FAA. AOPA believes that AC&C should be transferred to FAA in order to avoid negatively impacting general aviation safety or increasing chart costs.

## ***Conclusion***

A decision on the placement of AC&C is needed to address employee concerns and ensure an effective transition from NOAA to the Department of Transportation. We recognize that the Department of Transportation needs to work with the Congress in this regard. A good portion of employee concerns are the result of uncertainty about where AC&C will be placed and when that decision will be made. However, even a prompt decision to move AC&C to TASC will not resolve all employee concerns. AC&C employees recognize that a fee-for-service organization, such as TASC, will make every effort to recover costs through fees and this could result in a reduction in the size of the workforce.

## ***Management Comments***

A draft of this report was provided to the Directors of AC&C and TASC and AC&C union officials for review and comment. TASC reviewed the report and provided no substantive comments on the draft report. The Director of AC&C concurred that the draft report was a reasonable analysis of the results of the survey. The official representing one of the two unions stated that the survey results could not be considered valid, because employees were not asked to express opinions on proposals other than TASC. Although TASC developed a detailed transition plan for the potential transfer of AC&C, plans for other alternatives, such as FAA, have not been developed. As a result, questions in our survey focused on the proposed transfer of AC&C to TASC. The final survey was endorsed by the union officials.



## ***Action Required***

Please provide written comments within 15 days on specific actions taken or planned. We appreciate the courtesies and assistance extended to our staff during this audit. If I can answer any questions or be of further assistance, please feel free to contact me at (202) 366-1992, or Tom Howard, Deputy Assistant Inspector General for Maritime and Departmental Programs, at (202) 366-5630.

2 Exhibits

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## ***Objective, Scope, and Methodology***

The objectives of the AC&C survey were: (1) to obtain AC&C employees' views on the proposed relocation of AC&C to TASC and (2) to identify any employee concerns on why this relocation could be detrimental to AC&C activities.

Questions in the survey were focused on the potential transfer of AC&C to TASC. Other organizational locations for AC&C were not considered since definitive plans for alternative locations did not exist and appropriate comparisons therefore could not be made. The fieldwork was conducted from May to September 1999, in accordance with Government Auditing Standards prescribed by the Comptroller General of the United States. All fieldwork was coordinated with the Department of Commerce Office of Inspector General.

A written questionnaire was used to systematically obtain employee opinions. An anonymous response was used to ensure the highest possible return. The survey population included all current AC&C employees. Questionnaires were mailed to each employee at their home address, and included a postage-paid reply envelope to return the response directly to the Office of Inspector General.

A draft questionnaire was developed, and was reviewed by AC&C management, the two labor unions representing AC&C employees, and the Department of Commerce Inspector General. Prior to mailing the questionnaire, we conducted a pretest of the draft questionnaire with five AC&C employees to validate the survey document. The final survey document contained 19 questions.

We preceded the mailing of the questionnaire with an advance letter of support from AC&C management and unions, which was also mailed to each employee. To encourage additional responses, we followed the questionnaire with a reminder letter. We provided employees with approximately 4 weeks to respond to the survey.

Agency views of the potential transfer of AC&C to TASC were obtained from the Directors of AC&C, TASC, and FAA's Air Traffic Services. A draft of the report was provided for review and comment to the Directors of AC&C and TASC, the AC&C union officials, and the Department of Commerce Office of Inspector General.

## ***SURVEY RESULTS***

***Response percentages are displayed for each question.  
(Actual response counts are included in parenthesis.)***

### **SURVEY OF OFFICE OF AERONAUTICAL CHARTING AND CARTOGRAPHY EMPLOYEES**



#### **INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING THE SURVEY**

**Your responses to this survey will be completely anonymous. Do not put your name or other identification anywhere on this questionnaire.**

**You may skip any questions you don't want to answer, but please answer questions honestly. Your personal views are important.**

Please indicate your answers by placing an X or a check mark in the appropriate box. You may use either pencil or pen, as long as your marks are clear. If you want to change an answer, be sure your new mark is clearly indicated.

Correct Marks           

If you are asked to write an answer, please use the space provided.

If you have any questions about this survey, please contact Mr. Mike Sivy, Office of Inspector General, U.S. Department of Transportation, at (202) 366-6874.

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**U.S. Department of Transportation  
Office of Inspector General, JA-40  
400 Seventh Street, S.W.  
Washington, DC 20590**

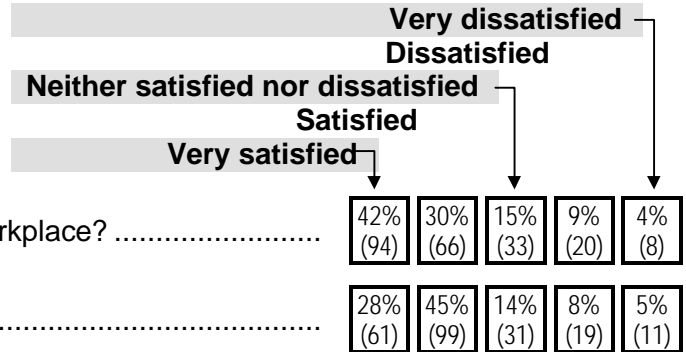
## YOUR JOB WITH AC&C

**1. How long have you worked for the Office of Aeronautical Charting and Cartography (AC&C)?**

- 7% (15)    Less than 1 year
- 6% (14)    1 year or more but less than 2 years
- 7% (16)    2 years or more but less than 5 years
- 19% (42)    5 years or more but less than 10 years
- 61% (135)    10 years or more

<1% (1)    I don't work for AC&C → **STOP HERE.** Please return this survey in the enclosed postage-paid envelope. Thank you.

**2. Overall, how satisfied are you with...**



## AC&C OPERATIONS

**3. How would you describe the overall morale in AC&C at this time?**

- 3% (7)    Morale is very high
- 9% (20)    Morale is moderately high
- 22% (47)    Morale is neither high nor low
- 47% (101)    Morale is moderately low
- 19% (42)    Morale is very low

**4. What do you think has the greatest impact on morale at this time?**

Uncertainty	47% (97)
Management	13% (26)
Salary/Grades	12% (24)
Budget	8% (16)

Move to TASC	7% (15)
Workload	5% (10)
Don't know	2% (4)
Other	6% (12)

**5. How familiar are you with the proposal to transfer AC&C from NOAA to the Transportation Administrative Service Center (TASC) at the Department of Transportation?**

47% (105)	Very familiar
39% (87)	Moderately familiar
12% (26)	Slightly familiar
2% (4)	Not at all familiar

**6. Overall, what is your opinion of transferring AC&C to TASC? Are you...**

14% (30)	Strongly in favor
16% (36)	Moderately in favor
17% (38)	Neither in favor nor opposed
18% (41)	Moderately opposed
35% (77)	Strongly opposed

**7. What would be the greatest advantage of transferring AC&C to TASC?**

No advantage	22% (42)
Keep AC&C intact	14% (27)
AC&C is wanted	9% (18)
Keep jobs	9% (17)
Grades/potential	7% (14)
Permanence/Home	6% (12)

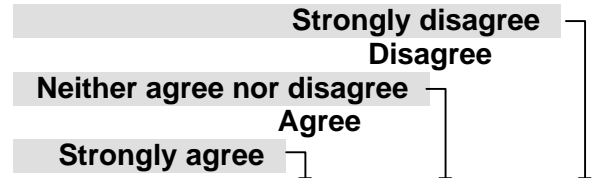
New products	5% (9)
Autonomy	4% (7)
Collocation	2% (5)
Don't know	5% (9)
Other	17% (32)

**8. What would be the greatest disadvantage of transferring AC&C to TASC?**

No disadvantage	5% (9)
Job security	21% (42)
Commute/location	20% (41)
Not the same mission	15% (30)
Disruption of operations	5% (10)
Lack of promotions	5% (9)

Funding/Budget	5% (9)
More bureaucracy	5% (9)
Belong in FAA	4% (7)
The unknown	3% (6)
Don't know	3% (6)
Other	9% (19)

9. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements by marking one answer for each statement:



a) AC&C has a reputation for producing high-quality work.....	74% (163)	17% (39)	8% (17)	0% (0)	1% (2)
b) AC&C has a reputation for producing timely work.....	80% (178)	13% (29)	6% (12)	0% (0)	1% (3)
c) AC&C would maintain its reputation if transferred to TASC .....	27% (59)	16% (35)	31% (68)	13% (28)	13% (27)

10. What kind of short-term effect do you think a transfer to TASC would have on AC&C's products and services?

7% (15)	Strong positive effect
9% (20)	Moderate positive effect
39% (85)	Little or no effect
32% (69)	Moderate negative effect
13% (27)	Strong negative effect

11. What aspect of AC&C's products and services would be affected the most in the short term?

None	14% (23)
Products/quality	14% (22)
Timeliness	13% (21)
Productivity	8% (12)
Identity/name recognition	6% (10)
Printing and Distribution	6% (10)
Morale	6% (9)

Personnel Loss	4% (6)
Funding	3% (5)
Chart prices	3% (5)
Automation	2% (4)
Don't know	12% (19)
Other	9% (14)

12. What kind of long-term effect do you think a transfer to TASC would have on AC&C's products and services?

14% (29)	Strong positive effect
20% (40)	Moderate positive effect
20% (41)	Little or no effect
20% (41)	Moderate negative effect
26% (54)	Strong negative effect

**13. What aspect of AC&C's products and services would be affected the most in the long term?**

None	9% (13)
Growth/new products	12% (19)
Quality	11% (17)
Loss of Products	8% (12)
Personnel Loss	7% (10)
Printing and Distribution	6% (9)

TASC will be dissolved	5% (8)
Reputation	4% (6)
Chart prices	4% (6)
Don't know	10% (16)
Other	24% (36)

**14. If AC&C is transferred to TASC, how likely is it that you will choose to remain with the organization?**

37% (82)	Very likely
19% (41)	Likely
25% (56)	Undecided
10% (23)	Unlikely
9% (19)	Very unlikely

**15. Do you think transferring AC&C to TASC would increase or decrease the number of jobs at AC&C?**

3% (6)	There would be a <u>substantial increase</u> in the number of jobs
13% (28)	There would be some <u>increase</u> in the number of jobs
35% (74)	There would be little or no effect on the number of jobs at AC&C
35% (75)	There would be some <u>decrease</u> in the number of jobs
14% (30)	There would be a <u>substantial decrease</u> in the number of jobs

**16. Do you think transferring AC&C to TASC would make it less or more likely that your job would be eliminated?**

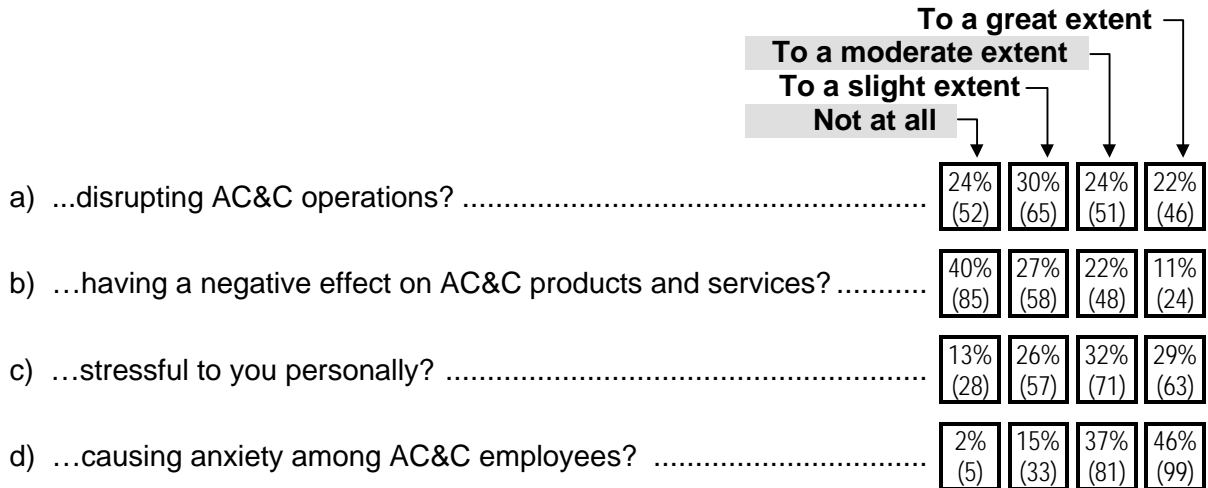
8% (18)	My job would be <u>much less likely</u> to be eliminated
13% (29)	My job would be <u>less likely</u> to be eliminated
51% (109)	My job would be neither less nor more likely to be eliminated
20% (42)	My job would be <u>more likely</u> to be eliminated
8% (17)	My job would be <u>much more likely</u> to be eliminated

**17. Besides transferring AC&C to TASC, is there an alternative transfer of the organization that you think should be considered? If so, what is that alternative?**

None/TASC	12% (22)
FAA	43% (78)
NOAA/status quo	29% (53)
DOT Independent org.	6% (11)

NOAA but not NOS	3% (6)
Independent agency	2% (4)
Existing mapping agency	1% (2)
Other	4% (7)

**18. To what extent is the current uncertainty about AC&C's future location...**



**COMMENTS**

**19. Thank you for your cooperation. If you have any comments or concerns that were not addressed in the survey, please use the space below.**

*[Note: a number of respondents identified more than one issue.]*

Decision needs to be made / uncertainty	(43)
Move to FAA	(30)
Anxiety / Stress / Morale	(29)
Budget / funding needed	(27)
Location	(24)
Stay at NOAA	(24)
Don't move to TASC	(23)
Reputation and mission of TASC	(20)
Politics / motive / trust	(19)
Grades / Salary / Promotion	(15)

Safety critical	(15)
Very good work done by AC&C	(14)
Workload / personnel shortages	(14)
Employee concerns not addressed	(13)
Job security / RIFs	(12)
Training	(10)
Modernization	(9)
Don't move to FAA	(8)
Protecting management's jobs	(6)
Other	(16)

**THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS SURVEY!**

**Please return your completed survey in the enclosed postage-paid envelope.**



