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The 2024 Federal Aviation Administration Reauthorization

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Reauthorization Act of 2024 (P.L. 118-63) was signed into law on May 16, 2024. The act provides key civil aviation authorizations, including Airport and Airway Trust Fund revenue collection authority, airport grant obligation authority, and certain other FAA expenditure authorities, through FY2028. Authorized funding levels for FAA's four major accounts are shown in **Table 1**.

Prior authority to operate and fund civil aviation programs under the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-254) expired at the end of FY2023. Four short-term extensions were enacted between September 2023 and May 2024 to prevent authorization lapses in the intervening time.

The FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 includes extensive language that addresses changes to FAA's organization and regulatory oversight functions; measures to address air traffic controller staffing and training; modernization of the national airspace system (NAS); aviation workforce development initiatives; aviation safety improvement efforts; initiatives to accommodate new airspace users, including drones and advanced air mobility (AAM) concepts; and measures to address passenger airline service.

FAA Organization and Oversight

The FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 imposes new requirements clarifying that a candidate for the FAA administrator position may not be active duty or retired military and must have experience in organizational management in a field directly related to aviation. The act also creates a new post at FAA, the assistant administrator for rulemaking and regulatory improvement, to coordinate the regulatory agenda, prioritize rulemaking, and address regulatory exemptions and waivers through a systematic process. Additionally, the act establishes a cybersecurity lead position to manage and oversee the cybersecurity requirements and needs of FAA systems. The act also orders reviews of FAA's workforce plans and staffing standards for aviation safety inspectors.

Air Traffic Controller Staffing

The act directs FAA to maximize hiring of air traffic controllers based on the availability of appropriations and training capacity. It directs FAA to develop a plan to expand air traffic controller training capacity and to address the recruitment, hiring, and retention of instructors. It also requires FAA to improve and expand the use of simulation technologies for controller training as well as review and revise controller staffing standards to ensure adequate numbers of fully qualified controllers.

National Airspace System Modernization

The act directs FAA to sunset the NextGen office, which has been overseeing airspace modernization efforts over the past 15 years, at the end of 2025. In its place, the act calls for the creation of a new Airspace Modernization Office that will be responsible for the continuous modernization of the NAS, including the development of an info-centric NAS (ICN). The new office also will focus on increased use of automation and evolving capabilities to accommodate established airspace users, including civilian and military aircraft, as well as new entrant technologies, including unmanned aircraft and AAM. The act redefines the air traffic control system to include infrastructure and services provided by third parties that support air navigation and air traffic management in coordination with FAA. This is intended to recognize the anticipated role of private service providers in managing low altitude airspace and operations conducted by new entrant technologies. The act also directs FAA to establish a new steering committee to advise on integrating advanced aviation technologies.

Aviation Workforce Development

The act expands two existing aviation workforce development grant programs—one for training future pilots and the other for programs related to aviation maintenance technical careers—and provides for up to \$20 million in annual appropriations for each program through FY2028. The act establishes a third workforce development program focused on the aviation manufacturing technical workforce, which is also authorized up to \$20 million annually through FY2028. The act directs FAA to revise training and qualification standards for aviation maintenance technician applicants with relevant military experience and improve outreach and awareness to ease the transition between military and civilian aviation maintenance careers. The act also directs FAA to collaborate with minority serving institutions to promote awareness of aviation education and career opportunities and FAA internships, and it establishes an advisory committee to foster aviation career opportunities for women.

The act orders FAA to establish an enhanced training program to streamline qualification of airline first officer prospects who follow a structured curriculum. It also directs FAA to convene a working group to review pilot medical certification and the evaluation of medical conditions, including mental health. The act does not address a legislative proposal to raise the maximum airline pilot age to 67 for domestic flights, thus leaving the retirement age for airline pilots at 65.

Aviation Safety Initiatives

The act directs FAA to require additional reporting of heavy maintenance performed on airline aircraft outside of

the United States, step up unannounced inspections of foreign repair stations, and impose new qualification requirements for airline aircraft maintainers. The act also mandates new ethics training for employees of aircraft manufacturers delegated to conduct aircraft certification functions under FAA’s Organization Designation Authorization (ODA) program and establishes a biennial forum to share ODA best practices. It also orders reviews of aircraft type certification processes, flight testing, and FAA use of aviation safety data. The act clarifies that FAA shall have exclusive authority to impose regulations to assure cybersecurity of civilian aircraft and aircraft systems. It also directs FAA to conduct a review of its final rule mandating safety management systems (SMSs) for charter flight and air tour operators as well as aircraft manufacturers, and it stipulates that SMS programs should be scalable based on organizational size and complexity.

Drones and Advanced Air Mobility

The act directs FAA to finalize regulations allowing for routine operations of drones beyond visual line of sight, paving the way for a variety of applications, such as package delivery and inspections and the monitoring of linear infrastructure (e.g., power lines, pipelines, railroads, and highways). It allows for transport of certain hazardous materials, including batteries and certain medical supplies, by drone and orders FAA to establish a process for approving third party vendors to provide air traffic management services for drone operations. The act reauthorizes a number of programs to study integration of drones into the NAS and establishes new grant programs for drone infrastructure inspection and drone education and workforce training. It also directs FAA to create a process for restricting drone flights over certain large outdoor gatherings and adds state prisons to a list of facilities eligible to apply for designation as drone-restricted airspace.

The act directs FAA to finalize rules regarding the design and pilot training requirements for vertical lift aircraft used in AAM applications and directs FAA to take necessary steps to integrate such aircraft into the NAS. It directs FAA to update design standards for AAM landing facilities known as vertiports, and it allows for streamlining

environmental reviews of vertiports and airport infrastructure changes to accommodate AAM operations. It also directs FAA to establish a center for advanced aviation technologies to support testing of AAM concepts and their integration into the NAS and authorizes up to \$35 million annually through FY2028 to fund the center.

Passenger Airline Service

The act introduces new measures to reform the Essential Air Service (EAS) program, which subsidizes passenger airline service to eligible small and isolated communities, including the gradual reduction in subsidy cap under which a community may remain eligible for the EAS program. It also imposes limitations on waivers that the Secretary of Transportation may grant to communities that fail to comply with certain statutory eligibility requirements, such as the minimum of 10 daily enplanements.

Federal law and regulation set the total number of flights at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA) to a maximum of 67 hourly slots. In addition, statutory perimeter rule limits nonstop flights to a 1,250-mile radius unless granted an exemption in law. The act directs the Secretary of Transportation to grant 10 additional daily slots, within the confines of slot control, for nonstop service between DCA and domestic airports within or beyond the 1,250-mile perimeter. On October 16, 2024, the Department of Transportation tentatively allocated two slot exemptions at DCA to each of five carriers—Alaska Airlines, American Airlines, Delta Air Lines, Southwest Airlines, and United Airlines—for nonstop roundtrip service to San Diego, San Antonio, Seattle, Las Vegas, and San Francisco, respectively.

The act includes airline consumer protection provisions. For example, it requires an airline to provide full ticket refunds, including taxes and ancillary fees, for cancelled or significantly delayed or changed flights no later than seven business days after the date of the refund request for credit card purchases and no later than 20 days for other forms of payment. The act requires the Secretary to direct airlines to establish policies on reimbursement for costs incurred due to a flight cancellation or significant delay directly attributed to the airline, including meals and lodging.

Table I. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Major Account Funding Authorizations (in millions of dollars)

FAA Account	FY2024	FY2025	FY2026	FY2027	FY2028
Operations	12,730	13,055	13,354	13,650	13,954
Airport Improvement Program	3,350	4,000	4,000	4,000	4,000
Facilities and Equipment	3,191	3,575	3,625	3,675	3,725
Research, Engineering, and Development	280	311	323	334	345
Total	19,551	20,941	21,302	21,659	22,024

Source: P.L. 118-63, §101, §102, §103, and §1002.

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