



Collision at LaGuardia Airport Spotlights Longstanding Concerns Over Runway Safety

March 30, 2026

On the night of March 22, 2026, a [Jazz Aviation regional jet landing at LaGuardia Airport](#) (LGA) in New York, NY, struck a firefighting vehicle that had received air traffic control clearance to cross the active runway. The collision killed both pilots and injured a flight attendant, several passengers, and two firefighters. The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) is leading an investigation of the crash, assisted by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), the Transportation Safety Board of Canada (representing the country of aircraft registry), the airline, the airplane manufacturer, and others.

FAA and the aviation industry have been long concerned over safety risks associated with airport surface operations, including the movements of aircraft and ground vehicles. The deadliest crash in civil aviation history occurred on March 27, 1977, in Tenerife, Spain, when [two jumbo jets collided](#) resulting in 583 fatalities. A notable runway disaster in the United States occurred on February 1, 1991—35 people were killed when a USAir Boeing 737 landing at Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) collided with a SkyWest regional turboprop instructed to line up on the same runway. These crashes prompted a continuing focus on monitoring and mitigating operational risks in the airport environment.

FAA closely tracks [runway incursions](#) (events involving the incorrect presence of an aircraft, vehicle, or person on an airport runway). Runway incursions pose significant collision risks, and the high speeds of aircraft takeoffs and landings increase the potential for significant aircraft damage and serious or fatal injuries. Runway incursions result from human errors including incorrect air traffic control clearances, aircraft landings or takeoffs without clearances, or aircraft or ground vehicles entering or crossing runways without clearances. These events are precipitated by various underlying factors including degraded situational awareness, high workload, unfamiliar settings or procedures, reduced visibility, and communications errors. FAA investigates runway incursions and [classifies](#) them based on their severity and the source of the error. Since 2022, the total number of [runway incursions](#) in the United States has remained relatively consistent at around 1,700 annually. It was [reported](#) that over the past five years, collisions were narrowly avoided 26 times and on 52 other occasions, the event posed a significant collision potential. Given that there are more than [20 million commercial flights](#) per year, serious runway incursions are low-probability events, but they pose significant collision dangers.

LGA is one of five [high-density traffic airports](#) in the United States where the number of hourly operations have specific caps set in regulation. Most U.S. airports do not have regulatory caps on the

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number of flights, and setting operational limits has not been regarded as a strategy for managing air traffic workload and operational safety at U.S. airports.

Two controllers staffed the LGA tower cab at the time of the March 22 accident. While this has been reported to be a [standard staffing level](#), it may renew concerns regarding operational workload and the effectiveness of ongoing efforts to hire and train additional controllers, which has been an [FAA](#) and [congressional](#) priority.

To provide enhanced monitoring of surface operations and improve situational awareness, surveillance technology called [Airport Surface Detection Equipment, Model X \(ASDE-X\)](#) has been deployed at 35 airports, including LGA. ASDE-X relies on surface radar and [Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast \(ADS-B\)](#) to monitor the movements of aircraft as well as ground vehicles that are equipped with position transmitting devices. The system includes visual and auditory alerts to warn controllers of potential runway incursions and collision hazards. A similar system, [the Airport Surface Surveillance Capability \(ASSC\)](#), is installed at 8 other civil airports. Aircraft with [ADS-B In](#) capabilities can also receive ASSC data on cockpit displays using FAA's [Traffic Information Service-Broadcast \(TIS-B\)](#). It has been [reported](#) that the truck involved in the March 22 crash did not have an [ADS-B transmitter](#) that would have allowed it to be visible on these systems. There are no FAA requirements to equip ground vehicles with these transmitters, leaving it up to airports to voluntarily install them. LGA and 19 other U.S. airports have been equipped with [runway status lights](#) that can signal whether it is safe to enter or cross a runway or initiate a takeoff independent of air traffic control instructions.

Following numerous high-profile runway incursions and other close calls, FAA sponsored an aviation [safety summit](#) and [“call to action”](#) in 2023. Safety reviews conducted in conjunction with this initiative led to a number of recommendations to further enhance situational awareness technologies, provide additional training, and implement procedural changes to mitigate airport safety risks. A March 2025 [Department of Transportation Office of Inspector General audit](#) found that while FAA's efforts improved awareness and information sharing about runway safety, FAA lacked an integrated approach for analyzing data and deploying key mitigation measures.

Since the [January 29, 2025, midair collision](#) between an Army helicopter and a regional jet near Washington Reagan National Airport (DCA), Congress has been debating legislative options to enhance aviation safety. The ROTOR Act (S. 2503; H.R. 6222), as passed by the Senate, would require ADS-B In to be installed and operating on aircraft flown in most controlled airspace. In contrast, the ALERT Act (H.R. 7613), under consideration in the House, would require “negotiated” FAA rulemaking that would mandate collision mitigation systems for certain aircraft. [Proponents of the ALERT Act](#) note benefits to providing flexible options, potentially allowing for receipt and display of ADS-B data on portable devices like electronic flight bags or tablets as an alternative to aircraft-installed systems. The NTSB issued an [analysis of the ALERT Act](#), finding that the bill does not fully implement NTSB [recommendations](#), including a recommendation to more broadly require ADS-B In systems with audible traffic alerts on all aircraft operating in airspace where ADS-B Out transmitters are currently mandated.

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