



The Leader In Recreational Aviation

Chapter 736 Newsletter for September 2017

House to vote on air traffic control overhaul next month

The House will vote on a President Trump-backed plan to separate air traffic control from the federal government in early October, according to the head of the House Transportation panel.

Rep. Bill Shuster (R-Pa.), chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, told The Hill on Wednesday that lawmakers will first need to clear a short-term extension of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

The controversial spinoff proposal was included in the House version of long-term legislation to reauthorize the FAA, whose legal authority expires at the end of September.

“We’re doing an extension when we come back... and then the first couple weeks of October, [the spinoff plan] is going to be on the floor,” Shuster said.

The Pennsylvania Republican, who has been one of the chief congressional proponents of the privatization push, said lawmakers are still deciding how long the short-term patch will be.

“Still working on that,” he said. “It will probably get through the end of the year, to give us some time.”

A similar effort to transfer the country’s air navigation system to a nonprofit corporation never made it to the House floor last year. This year’s proposal has also struggled to attract votes in the lower chamber, despite Trump’s endorsement.

But Shuster assured The Hill that they were now “close enough that we’re going to be on the floor” next month. He pointed out that three Democrats have signed onto the bill.

Across the Capitol, the Senate declined to include the idea in its own version of an FAA reauthorization. That bill has also remained stalled, but over other sticking points that have yet to be resolved.

GAO REPORT: ATC SYSTEM PERFORMING WELL

A newly released report by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) backs up what AOPA and other general aviation groups have been saying for months: Air traffic control technology upgrades are on budget and already increasing efficiency despite claims by the airlines.

According to a [report in Bloomberg](#), “The GAO’s findings are closer to those of the private-plane lobby, which has argued that the existing system has performed well and that there’s no need to create a private air-traffic organization.”

As the GAO report uncovers, NextGen technology is performing well and has even increased flight efficiency and saved airlines millions of dollars in fuel costs. In Atlanta, a separate FAA program bringing airplanes closer together allowed Delta Airlines to increase daily operations by 6.8 percent. By 2025, the FAA’s basic goals for NextGen are set to be completed and still within cost estimates from a decade ago.

Despite the undeniable progress in NetGen, there are some who want to overhaul the system entirely. Rep. Bill Shuster (R-Pa.) wants to codify in H.R. 2997, a bill that would remove ATC from the FAA and turn it over to the airlines. The 21st Century AIRR Act passed Shuster's Transportation and Infrastructure Committee in July. With Congress back from summer recess, pressure to vote on the legislation looms in the House.

Even with the GAO findings, supporters of H.R. 2997 are not willing to ease up on criticism of the system. Citizens For On Time Flights, an organization facilitated by the airline advocacy association Airlines for Americas, has released a barrage of attacks on the current system calling it “outdated” and the “cause of flight delays.” The attack ads online and on social networks come despite the fact that the airlines themselves are responsible for 50 percent of delays. As far as the outdated argument goes, many airlines have yet to upgrade their own fleets with newer technology necessary to reap the benefits of modernization that have already taken place.

The report is the second major criticism supporters of the legislation encountered recently with the announcement by the American Conservative Union Foundation that the legislation is not really privatization and should be withdrawn.

PART 23 REFORM TAKES EFFECT

Aircraft certification reforms long in the making took effect Aug. 30, creating new ways to improve safety and affordability across the general aviation fleet.

The final rule that reforms small aircraft certification standards was issued in December, and allows manufacturers to use performance-based, consensus standards in lieu of

“prescriptive” standards that have long hindered the development and implementation of new technologies in both new aircraft and the existing fleet. AOPA Senior Director of Regulatory Affairs David Oord said the new certification rule and methods of compliance will reverse that situation, improving safety and reducing cost, and also speeding the arrival of new aircraft and equipment.

“We are expecting to see new aircraft designs come to market that incorporate new and novel technologies at a price point that was previously unattainable,” Oord said. “General aviation is at a critical point in its history, and we believe that this reform, now effective, will make significant improvements in both the safety and affordability of the GA fleet while serving as a catalyst for growth.”

The General Aviation Manufacturers Association has had a central role in the reform process, from conception to execution, and recently organized a series of workshops with the FAA to help educate manufacturers and other stakeholders about the implications and opportunities of the new regulatory approach.

Part 23 reform also was supported by Congress, which mandated that the FAA streamline the approval process for equipment that will enhance safety in both new and existing GA aircraft. The new rule applies to aircraft weighing 19,000 pounds or less, with 19 or fewer passenger seats, and will allow much easier and less expensive retrofits of equipment designed to prevent loss of control, or mitigate icing, among other things.

Next Meeting to be determined