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Long-Term FAA Funding Accelerates NextGen Work, Allows Airline Planning

Welcome to Wired!

For the last eight years, commercial aviation has been doing its best to get ready for the Next Generation Air Transportation system. It's not been easy for anyone. NextGen is a complex system complicated by the uncertainty of long-term FAA funding.

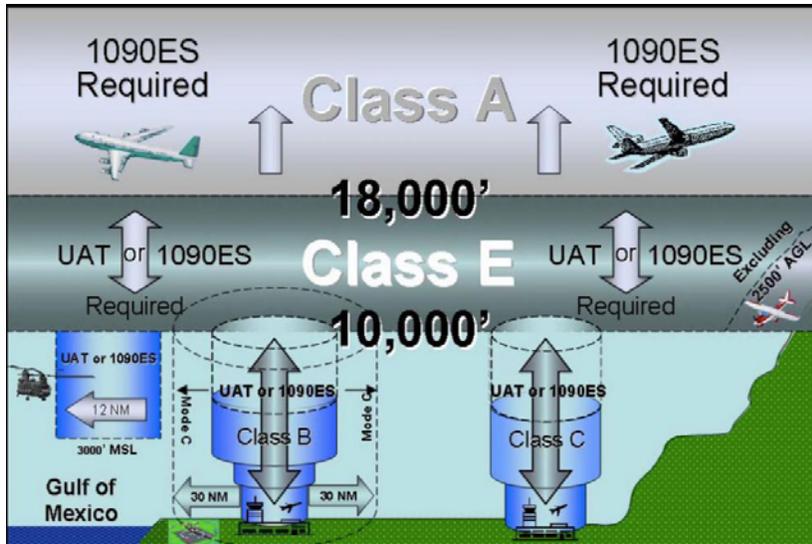
Bickering over ancillary ideology, Congress has hamstrung NextGen since 2007, when the last long-term FAA authorization expired. While politicians argued, the industry did its best with 23 temporary funding bills and one partial shutdown of the FAA.



Those days are over until 2015. Congress passed a \$63 billion funding bill that will support the FAA until then, and President Obama signed it on Valentine's Day. The bill creates the FAA Chief NextGen Officer, who will work to an accelerated schedule, providing annual reports on progress. With deadlines anchored to February 14:

The FAA has six months to consult with industry reps and issue a report on RNP/RNAV airport ops and 18 months to schedule the implementation of RNP/RNAV procedures at 30% of the 35 operational evaluation partnership (OEP) airports. It must cover 60% in 36 months and 100% by June 30, 2015. It has 18 months for 25% of non-OEP airports, 36 months for 50%, with all airports covered by June 30, 2016.

The FAA has a year to submit its plan and timetable bringing the nationwide Data Communication System on line. It also has prescribed deadlines for NextGen's surface systems, such as Airport Surface Detection Equipment-Model X program.



Despite eight years of uncertain funding, the FAA has been making progress. Take ADS-B. The new [AC 90-114](#) gives an overview of the system and guidance on how to comply with the ADS-B Out requirements. In this bill, Congress extended its previous the deadline five years, to January 1, 2020.

In late January, the FAA announced that free ADS-B In-cockpit traffic and weather information services are now available at 51 terminal areas, and that free en route ADS-B In traffic and weather services are now available in service areas centered on Houston, Texas, and a good portion of Alaska.

Aircraft equipped with the 978MHz Universal Access Transceiver (UAT) can receive both traffic and flight (weather) information. Those equipped with 1090 MHz Extended Squitter (1090 ES), required for flight above Flight Level 180, receive only traffic info.

The future of ADS-B In is not yet carved in regulatory stone. Flight Global reports that the long-term funding bill directs the FAA to initiate rulemaking in the next year that mandates ADS-B In for aircraft flying in “capacity constrained airspace” or at “capacity constrained airports.”

This requirement contradicts the recommendations from an FAA aviation rulemaking committee evaluating this technology. In November 2011, it said that “In’s” applications had not yet matured.

But Congress did nod at the ARC’s recommendation. The new NextGen officer must verify that the ADS-B ground network is “installed and functioning” before issuing any interim or final equipment rules.

ADS-B In seems to be the only major NextGen component with an uncertain future. With FAA funding and deadlines in place through 2015, operators of transport category aircraft can start finalizing their plans to equip their fleets for NextGen.

Key Players:

“A4A (Airlines for America) and its members deeply appreciate the leadership and the tireless work of Senate Commerce Committee Chairman John Rockefeller (D-WV) and Ranking Member Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX), as well as Aviation Subcommittee Chairwoman Maria Cantwell (D-WA) and Ranking Member John Thune (R-SD), in bringing this critical legislation to a successful conclusion.

“We also commend the leadership and tenacity of House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman John Mica (R-FL), Ranking Member Nick Rahall (D-WV), Aviation Subcommittee Chairman Tom Petri (R-WI) and Ranking Member Jerry Costello (D-IL) who understand well the importance of a strong commercial aviation industry and made this bill and its passage a priority.

“Finally, A4A thanks House Speaker John Boehner (R-OH) and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV), for removing the roadblocks to getting the bill approved and bringing bipartisan resolution to this much-needed and overdue bill.

“This bill saw many extensions, yet thanks to the leaders in both the House and the Senate, today we have a strong, multiyear bill.”