



Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives

Bill Shuster
Chairman

Washington, DC 20515

Peter A. DeFazio
Ranking Member

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February 21, 2018

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The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street N.W., Room 7000
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Comptroller General Dodaro:

At least five high-profile near misses and runway incursions along with a taxiway landing in the past seven months have raised new concerns about the possibility that such an occurrence in the future could lead to an accident—a possibility that warrants a thorough and systematic review.

These incidents include:

- July 7, 2017, at San Francisco (SFO): An Air Canada flight lined up to land on a taxiway occupied by four planes loaded with passengers before executing a go-around.
- October 12, 2017, at SFO: An Air Canada flight landed on a runway in spite of repeated instructions from air traffic control to execute a go-around.
- November 29, 2017, at Atlanta: A Delta Air Lines plane on approach in low visibility overflew a taxiway occupied by another plane loaded with passengers during a go-around.
- December 29, 2017, at Pullman, Washington: A Horizon Air plane landed on a taxiway.
- January 9, 2018, at SFO: An Aeromexico plane lined up to land on the wrong runway, which was occupied by a plane waiting to take off. The Aeromexico plane then executed a go-around.

While it is fortunate that none of the occurrences on this list led to a catastrophic accident or loss of life, it is important that we learn everything we possibly can so that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), which is responsible for protecting the safety of the flying public, can take the most meaningful, informed, and timely actions to prevent accidents in the future.

Toward this end, we request that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) conduct a study that both examines existing data on aviation safety incidents to determine if they represent any emerging patterns and assesses whether there are any gaps in the collecting and reporting of critical safety information.

In 2008, the GAO produced a report addressing runway safety titled, "Progress on Reducing Runway Incursions Impeded by Leadership, Technology, and Other Challenges." In 2011, in a report titled, "Enhanced Oversight and Improved Availability of Risk-Based Data Could Further Improve Safety," the GAO recommended that the FAA improve its metrics, oversight, and information sharing related to safety incidents in terminal areas: the airspace over and surrounding airports. Several years have passed since the issuance of these reports, and much has changed in the aviation industry, with much that we do not know about progress in implementing the GAO's previous recommendations. We therefore request that the GAO undertake a comprehensive study updating the 2008 report and identify any new issues that have emerged that require our attention. In particular, we request that the study address the following questions:

- 1) What is known about the trends in safety incidents and the factors contributing to those trends since 2008?
- 2) What framework exists for the FAA to investigate safety incidents, analyze trends, and require air carriers and other stakeholders to implement corrective actions to prevent the events' recurrence? Do any gaps exist in the rules, procedures and policies governing investigations into safety incidents and the reporting of findings?
- 3) Since your 2008 and 2011 reports, what types of new technologies and other FAA, airport, and airline actions have been implemented to address terminal area safety incidents? What is known about the effectiveness of these technologies and actions?
- 4) How does the FAA collect, analyze, and report data on terminal area safety incidents, and how has this changed since 2008, if at all?

We appreciate your attention to this request. Should you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Alex Burkett with the Subcommittee on Aviation at (202) 225-9161.


Sincerely,



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Ranking Member



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