

Opening Statement
The Honorable Ralph M. Hall (R-TX)
Ranking Member, Committee on Science and Technology
The Next Generation Air Transportation System: Issues and Status
September 11, 2008

Mr. Chairman, thank you for calling today's hearing to review the Federal Aviation Administration's development of the Next Generation Air Transportation System. I also want to extend a sincere thank you to our panel of expert witnesses for taking time from their busy schedules to appear before our Committee. The information and advice you provide this Committee and Congress will help us better deal with the challenges of modernizing our nation's critically important air traffic management system.

Congress passed legislation not quite five years ago calling for the creation of the Joint Planning and Development Office (JPDO) and charged it with planning for, and coordinating the research and development of, a next generation air transportation system. The rationale for Congress' action was clear – congestion in and around our nations' airports was reaching gridlock, resulting in significant economic losses to carriers, severely inconveniencing large numbers of passengers, and threatening the vitality of our economy. It was estimated that demand for airline services would triple by the year 2025, and absent a comprehensive and clearly-defined research, development and implementation program, future economic growth would be jeopardized. Therefore Congress responded by creating the JPDO to address this serious challenge.

Congress clearly recognized that integrating new, automated features into a nationwide network of communications, navigation and surveillance systems, is a huge challenge, and it will take clear and persistent management to achieve NextGen's goals. We also recognize that the future system must allow for more efficient routings and minimize delays in order to conserve fuel, the cost of which has risen dramatically in the last several months. Congress was confident then, as we are today, that through the focused leadership of the Federal Aviation Administration, the JPDO, its federal partners, and industry, these challenges will be met.

This is the second oversight hearing in as many years held by this Committee regarding NextGen. I also note that during the First Session of this Congress, our Committee produced legislation strengthening the role and visibility of the Joint Planning and Development Office. Sadly the legislation has been hung up in the Senate.

The nation's air traffic management system is fundamental to our economy and our quality of life. NextGen must not be allowed to falter. It is vitally important that there is accountability both at the FAA and among federal partners, and that roles and responsibilities are clearly articulated. So long as there is clarity in the management of NextGen, and a well-understood and sustainable research, development and implementation program, I am confident we will succeed.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and again my thanks to our witnesses for being here today.