

# NextGen Begins and Ends at Airports

**OVER THE LAST** few years, there has been much talk about the Next Generation Air Transportation System, or NextGen. While most of the attention focused on how NextGen will allow the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)

and the industry to transition to a satellite-based navigation system and help airlines operate more efficiently, there has been little public discussion about how it will impact airports. To change this, ACI-NA has been working to let Congress and the FAA know that NextGen begins and ends at airports.

Why does NextGen matter so much? Delay data collected by the FAA show that airports — especially those in congested metroplexes — are where the majority of delays occur. Smaller airports with air service to these metroplexes are also affected by ground delay programs, which delay departing flights. Passengers that use these airports weigh these potential delays when deciding whether to fly from their hometown airport or drive to a hub.

Regardless of where they occur, airport delays leave passengers frustrated and angry. They hurt airport efforts to serve the traveling public and sap productivity and economic competitiveness. A study published by the Partnership for New York City showed that delays at New York airports cost the regional economy \$2.6 billion in 2008 and that insufficient airport capacity in the region could be a significant impediment to growth over the next two decades. Delays

also increase aircraft fuel burn and emissions and are harmful to the environment.

NextGen promises to reduce delays by reducing the impact that poor weather has on airport capacity, reducing delay-causing interactions among nearby airports, and enabling more effective use of existing infrastructure. These benefits will result from enhanced airport surface surveillance and traffic management, improved flight procedures, and reduced separations.

Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood and FAA Administrator Randy Babbitt have emphasized that expediting NextGen is a key priority for the Obama administration. As Babbitt noted in his first public speech in June, "NextGen is just flat out not moving fast enough. We must accelerate NextGen. I want more, and I want more faster."

What is ACI-NA doing? We are helping to push NextGen forward through an industry task force led by RTCA, formerly the Radio Technical Commission for Aeronautics, which has focused on capabilities that can be implemented in the next five to eight years, many of which are focused directly on improving the efficiency of operations at airports and in the airspace surrounding them.

The task force ranked airport-focused NextGen capabilities very highly. It also noted that FAA must find ways to streamline the certification and operations approval processes as well as the environmental approvals required to implement some of the new air traffic procedures, especially around large metroplexes.

ACI-NA is also playing leading roles in Joint Planning and Development Office activities, focused on longer-term initiatives and has joined with airports, airlines, and industry stakeholders in the National Alliance to Advance NextGen, an organization working to keep political pressure on Congress and the FAA to implement NextGen capabilities as quickly as possible.

Will these efforts make a difference for airports in an almost decade-long program littered with good intentions and hundreds of acronyms, but with limited tangible accomplishments? "Yes!" The Obama administration has articulated its commitment to NextGen. The aviation industry — via the NextGen Task Force — has also. But most importantly, airports around the country have been moving forward aggressively to implement NextGen capabilities now. NextGen has indeed begun at airports; with committed effort going forward, we can ensure that we bring these efforts to a successful "end."

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## WEBLINKS

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