

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 9, 2026

The Honorable Sean Duffy
Secretary of the Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20590

The Honorable Bryan Bedford
Federal Aviation Administration Administrator
800 Independence Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Secretary Duffy and Administrator Bedford:

We write to express our concerns regarding the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) rollout of the AI-enabled Strategic Management of Airspace, Routes, and Trajectories (SMART) tool to help manage air traffic above the National Capital Region (NCR) at the Ronald Reagan Washington National (DCA), Baltimore/Washington International Thurgood Marshall (BWI), and Washington Dulles International (IAD) airports. The NCR is one of the busiest airspaces in the country and is still reeling from the impacts of the tragic midair collision of a passenger flight and military helicopter over DCA, in which 67 people died.¹ We are incredibly concerned by the use of the NCR region to pilot AI tools in safety-critical aviation systems, especially as we have not seen any safety evaluation and testing reports, nor have we been made aware of any efforts to train aviation safety personnel on how best to use the tool. Given extensive recent reporting on AI cybersecurity incidents and other unpredictable behavior from AI systems,² we are deeply concerned about the integration of any AI-enabled system into air traffic control systems, where decisions are literally a matter of life or death.

We understand that the SMART tool was built through a 12-year, \$875 million contract. Yet here has been little transparency from either the Department of Transportation (DOT) or the FAA on how the AI systems underlying the SMART tool were tested, how it is being integrated into air traffic control (ATC) systems, and how the tool's recommendations may impact already overburdened airspace and air traffic controllers. Nor has information been shared with local officials as to why the NCR, the region in which the deadliest U.S. air disaster in nearly 25 years occurred just last year, was chosen as the pilot test region. This, and other recent tragic aviation accidents such as the fatal March runway crash at LaGuardia Airport in New York, have highlighted the need for more investment in safer skies.³ We recognize the urgent

¹ Lolita Baldor, Tara Copp, Adrianna Gomez Licon & Lea Skeane, "Midair collision kills 67 people in the deadliest US air disaster in almost a quarter century", *AP News* (January 30, 2025). <https://apnews.com/article/ronald-reagan-national-airport-crash-62adba7fb1f546b4cf1716e42b86482b>

² Kai Nicol-Schwarz, "Anthropic's Mythos created fake identities to fool humans in new cyber incident", *CNBC* (August 5, 2026). <https://www.cnn.com/2026/08/05/anthropic-mythos-openai-security-breaches.html>

³ Rachel Treisman, Ayana Archie, "LaGuardia reopens after the crash that killed 2 and hurt dozens", *NPR* (March 23, 2026). <https://www.npr.org/2026/03/23/g-s1-114773/laguardia-air-canada-plane-collision-fire-truck>

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need to modernize ATC systems - Congress appropriated \$12.5 billion last year to do just that. However, any upgrades and changes to ATC systems must be made with safety as the first priority.⁴

However, we have heard from several sources that frontline aviation safety workers were notified of the SMART tool rollout mere days in advance or not at all, giving them no time to learn how the system works, how it is incorporated into their workflow, and what oversight and accountability mechanisms maintain aviation safety standards. There is already a shortage of air traffic controllers, and we are concerned that integrating this new technology into the workflows of already-overworked aviation safety personnel could have deleterious consequences.^{5 6} The air traffic control systems and processes currently in place are complex and we don't know what impact AI-enabled tools might have on these systems and resulting safety. Decades of research shows that people tend to over-rely on automated recommendations, a phenomenon known as automation bias, particularly under overworked conditions.⁷ Adding new, untested layers to these systems, especially those that are not yet "ready to immediately transform flight operations", according to airline industry officials, must be done in partnership with all stakeholders in the aviation safety ecosystem.⁸

We understand that the rollout of the SMART AI tool in the NCR on Monday, September 21, is part one of a phased rollout that begins with a 90-day evaluation period before broader, nationwide deployment. However, given the egregious lack of transparency around the initial rollout, especially at a time where there is so much public concern around the use of AI in critical systems, we ask that you pause any use of the SMART tool until we can better understand your decision-making, rollout process, and evaluation plan. We ask that you respond to the following questions no later than October 19, 2026:

Pre-Deployment Testing & Evaluations

1. Did the FAA make a formal In-Service Decision before SMART began operational use?
 - a. If so, which official and office made it, on what date, and on what basis?
 - b. Was the decision made within the FAA's Air Traffic Organization, or did Department of Transportation leadership direct or approve the launch date?
2. Was a Safety Risk Management evaluation conducted under the Air Traffic Organization's Safety Management System, and was a Safety Risk Management Document completed and signed? If so, please provide it.
3. Were any standard acquisition or safety review steps waived or truncated to meet the September 21 launch?

⁴ One Big Beautiful Bill Act. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/1/text#d3245e10478-intro-1>

⁵ "Air Traffic Control Workforce: FAA should establish goals and better assess its hiring process", GAO Report to Chairman of Senate Commerce, Science, & Transportation Committee (December 2025). <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-26-107320.pdf>

⁶ Dorothy Robyn, "Air traffic controllers and why there are n't enough of them", *Brookings Institution* (November 4, 2025). <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/air-traffic-controllers-and-why-there-arent-enough-of-them/>

⁷ Parasuraman R, Manzey DH. Complacency and bias in human use of automation: an attentional integration. *Hum Factors*. 2010 Jun;52(3):381-410. doi: 10.1177/0018720810376055. PMID: 21077562.

⁸ Oriana Pawlyk, "Inside airlines' panic as FAA pushed new AI tool", *Politico* (September 18, 2026). <https://www.politico.com/news/2026/09/18/faa-ai-airline-pushback-01083385>

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4. What AI models does SMART use and how has the FAA validated their accuracy? Please provide detailed information regarding what pre-deployment testing and evaluations were conducted on the AI models underlying SMART, as well as measures of SMART tool performance, including under severe weather, degraded data, or system outage conditions.
5. What factors did you consider in your decision to pilot this system in the National Capital Region rather than other regions? How was the final determination made and who made the determination?
6. OMB Memorandum M-25-21 categorizes AI used in “traffic control systems and other systems controlling physical transit” as high-impact, requiring pre-deployment testing, an AI impact assessment with independent review, and sufficient operator training. Has the Department determined SMART to be high-impact AI? If so, please provide documentation of the practices completed under Section 4(b). If the Department has determined it is not high-impact, or waived any practice, please provide the written determination required under Section 4(a).

Stakeholder Consultation & Training

7. What consultations did you conduct before deploying the SMART tool? What input did you solicit, and what feedback did you receive? Specifically include, at minimum, information regarding consultations with:
 - a. the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority
 - b. the Maryland Aviation Administration,
 - c. the National Air Traffic Controllers Association, and
 - d. airline industry officials.
8. What training did aviation safety personnel receive prior to deployment of the SMART tool?
9. How will the tool be integrated into existing ATC systems and processes?
10. What weight are controllers and traffic management specialists expected to give SMART recommendations when making decisions as compared to other factors? Do they have the ability to manually override SMART recommendations, including after local facility leadership has accepted them? If so, what is the process, and how are those overrides documented?
11. How are recommendations, and whether they were accepted or overridden, tracked and evaluated? Are they recorded in the National Traffic Management Log or a similar system?
12. Did the FAA satisfy any applicable collective bargaining or labor consultation obligations before deploying SMART? Please describe what notice was provided to the exclusive representatives of affected employees and when.

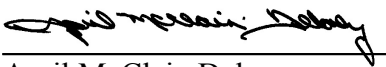
Assessments & Oversight

13. What data will be tracked in the 90-day evaluation?
14. What specific metrics will determine whether the 90-day evaluation is a success? How will progress toward that goal be measured, and who will conduct the evaluation?
15. What is the timeline for further implementation of this system and what benchmarks will determine if the deployment process should continue?
16. What is your plan for ensuring public transparency and trust-building with the flying public and aviation industry as you deploy the SMART tool?

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17. Who will provide oversight of the system?
18. What system do you have in place to enable independent oversight of the SMART tool, and who is responsible for conducting oversight (including but not limited to review by the National Transportation Safety Board following an incident)? Please provide details regarding your audit process of overseeing how the SMART tool reaches its recommendations, what actions are taken or not taken in response to these recommendations, and any safety implications of those decisions.
- a. In the event that a SMART recommendation contributes to a loss of separation or other safety incident, who bears responsibility - the controller who accepted the recommendation, the FAA, or the developer? Has the FAA made any determination on this question?

Sincerely,



April McClain Delaney
Member of Congress



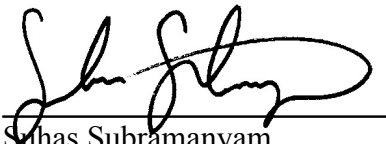
Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress



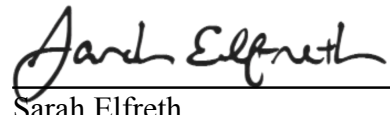
Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress



Kweisi Mfume
Member of Congress



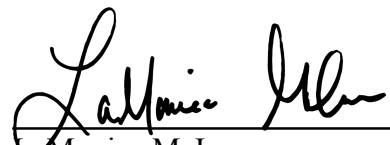
Suhas Subramanyam
Member of Congress



Sarah Elfreth
Member of Congress



Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



LaMonica McIver
Member of Congress

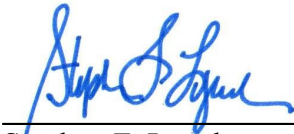
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Jared Huffman
Member of Congress



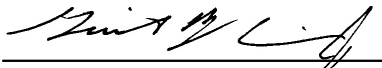
Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress



Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress



Raja Krishnamoorthi
Member of Congress



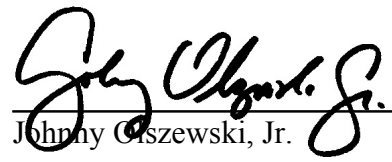
Gilbert Ray Cisneros, Jr.
Member of Congress



Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress



Sylvia R. Garcia
Member of Congress



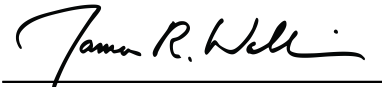
Johnny Ciszewski, Jr.
Member of Congress



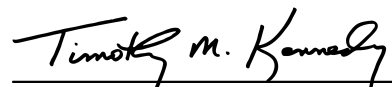
Paul D. Tonko
Member of Congress



Valerie P. Foushee
Member of Congress



James R. Walkinshaw
Member of Congress

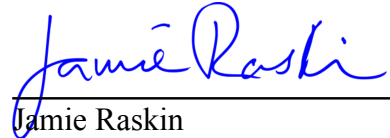


Timothy M. Kennedy
Member of Congress

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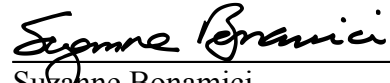
Mike Thompson
Member of Congress



Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress



Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress



Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator