

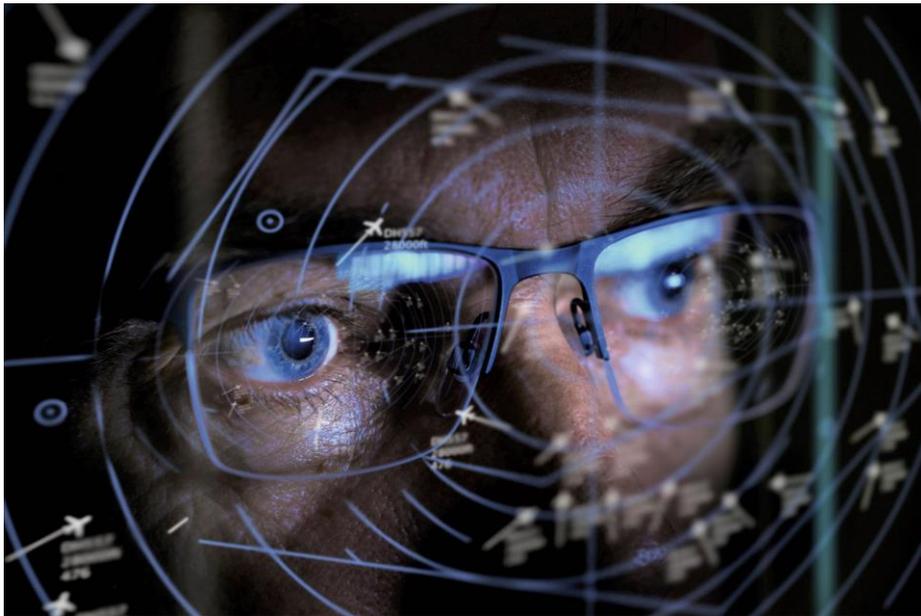
# Funding stability accelerates US airspace modernisation

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## The FAA ATO continues to address the various organisational and technological challenges it faces. *Jenny Beechener* reports

Multiyear funding for the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), authorised in October 2018, provides financial stability for the agency for the next five years. This is a welcome change to repeated budget extensions, and supports a more long-term approach to airspace modernisation by the FAA.

Resources remain a challenge – the total annual budget is largely unchanged at USD16 billion – so the Air Traffic Organization (ATO) is turning to industry collaboration to help achieve its goals. “We are not a bottomless pit when it comes to resources,” ATO Chief Operating Officer Teri Bristol said in October 2018 during the ATCA convention in Washington, DC. “We have a good track record of working collaboratively, everybody steps in the game now.”



*Eyes on the prize: the Federal Aviation Administration is collaborating with industry to achieve its overarching objective of transforming airspace management in the US. (Getty Images)*

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An example is the Low Altitude Authorization and Notification Capability (LAANC) service launched in 2017, in which third-party providers (14 have been approved at the time of writing) issue airspace authorisations for unmanned aerial system (UAS) operators nationwide. The programme is available at 500 airports nationwide with 14 companies approved to provide LAANC services. “We

are going to take what we are learning through LAANC, and use this to push us into the UTM [UAS traffic management] environment, and commercial space,” said Bristol.

She acknowledged that the FAA struggles to match this pace of development. “We are focused on traditional methodology – manned and block airspace. We know we need to automate and work in a more dynamic way.” The FAA has the source data and business rules, but it sees an opportunity for industry to drive the technology.

The same approach can be seen in the first US remote tower projects where FAA controllers participate at two pioneer sites and the agency plays an advisory role. Leesburg Executive Airport, Virginia, installed a camera system and remote control facility from Saab in 2016 and began testing air traffic control (ATC) services in 2018, supported by a mobile tower provided by Robinson Aviation. Separately, Northern Colorado Regional Airport in Fort Collins selected a remote tower solution from Searidge Technologies in the second half of 2017 and started testing the technology a year later. The FAA aims to develop performance-based technology requirements so vendors can build to these. “It’s not one-size-fits-all but we think there is a market out there,” said Bristol.

## **Recruitment**

The FAA is also taking a collaborative approach to staffing policy. The agency said it has recovered from the halt in new hires that lasted for most of 2013 following government sequestration. By hiring 1,800 controllers in each of the last three years, the agency claims to have restored staffing levels, although some facilities still lack certain skillsets. “Our toughest facility is New York TRACON [terminal control centre],” said Bristol. “We were in a place where we weren’t comfortable with the staffing level we had. Working together with the unions like the National Air Traffic Controllers Association [NATCA] and Professional Airways Safety Specialists [PASS] we’ve really focused our efforts.” The facility also falls within the high-priority area known as the Northeast Corridor (NEC), which the FAA identified as needing urgent performance improvement.

In response to challenges in TRACONs such as New York, the agency has introduced a new training programme that includes additional courses designed to support transition to complex terminal radar facilities from the FAA Oklahoma City Academy. NATCA identified a gap between classroom training and facility training, now filled by new qualifications such as Ten Eleven Twelve Radar Assessment (TETRA) and developmental courses. The association predicts better certification rates for the first graduates entering New York TRACON in July 2018. “We knew to deliver consistent good customer service, we needed to do something different,” explained Bristol.

[Continued in full version...]

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