



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

Washington, DC 20515

**Bill Shuster**  
Chairman

**Peter A. DeFazio**  
Ranking Member

Christopher P. Bertram, Staff Director

February 17, 2016

Katherine W. Dedrick, Democratic Staff Director

Dear Colleague:

I write to draw your attention to an editorial on Republican plans to privatize our air traffic control (ATC) system that was published over the weekend in the New York Times. The editorial, titled "Don't Privatize Air Traffic Control," reiterated many of the concerns I have regarding Chairman Shuster's proposal. The ATC privatization plan would disrupt work on the air traffic control modernization program, known as "NextGen", and give away public assets to a private corporation for free, all without regard to the impact on the flying public – consumers aren't even guaranteed a seat on the new corporate board.

The House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure narrowly approved Chairman Shuster's proposal last week, over the bipartisan objection of every Democrat and two Republicans. The current Federal Aviation Administration authorization expires at the end of March, and the Republican Leadership may schedule this legislation for Floor consideration very soon. I hope that you find this editorial helpful.

Sincerely,

PETER DeFAZIO  
Ranking Member

# Don't Privatize Air Traffic Control

By [THE EDITORIAL BOARD](#) FEB. 15, 2016

Some Republicans in the House have come up with a solution in search of a problem: [privatizing air traffic control](#). Democrats, the Obama administration and sensible Republicans ought to oppose this measure, which would do nothing to improve the present, federally operated system and indeed could make it worse.

The [proposal](#) by Bill Shuster of Pennsylvania and Frank LoBiondo of New Jersey was voted out of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee along partisan lines [on Thursday](#). [Their bill](#) would move the Federal Aviation Administration's air traffic control division to a new private, nonprofit corporation financed by fees from airlines and private aircraft owners. They argue that this private organization could move more quickly and cheaply than the F.A.A. to reduce congestion and delays.

But there is no credible evidence that a privately operated system would be better than the current one, which is the [busiest and safest](#) in the world. And there is plenty of reason to believe it would be worse.

Only two other major countries have privatized air traffic control, Canada and Britain, but their air systems are much smaller. Other countries like Germany and France run air traffic through government-owned companies. Delta, which is the only large airline to oppose the Republican plan, notes that air traffic control costs have [increased more](#) in Canada and Britain than in the United States since they privatized. Britain had to bail out its private air traffic control operator after the 2001 terrorist attacks when air travel declined around the world. Even if a private system did reduce costs, there is no guarantee that airlines would pass those savings to passengers.

The bill could also disrupt the F.A.A.'s work to increase the nation's flight capacity and reduce delays. That project is called [NextGen](#), and it has shown promising results. But the agency has taken longer and spent more than it expected. Mr. Shuster and his colleagues have pointed to this as a rationale for privatization, but they conveniently ignore the problems private companies often have with such large technical projects. Besides, Congress itself [is to blame](#) for some of NextGen's problems because it has not provided stable funding to the F.A.A. in recent years. If Republicans are serious about fixing problems with NextGen, they could work with Democrats like Representative Peter DeFazio of Oregon, who has proposed reforms to improve how the F.A.A. operates.

The privatization bill also gives short shrift to passengers' interests. The new air traffic operator is to have a 13-member board of directors, with four of them representing airlines, three representing the owners and operators of private planes and one for aerospace manufacturers. Just two people would be appointed by the secretary of transportation to stand up for the public, with the other seats going to the chief executive and unions.

Even more galling, the new company would not have to pay anything to acquire the towers, equipment and other assets of the existing system. The government has spent an [estimated \\$53.5 billion](#) on that system in just the last 20 years, with the money coming from passenger fees and tax revenue.

Republican sponsors of this proposal insist that it would not jeopardize safety, because the F.A.A. would have regulatory oversight of the private company that manages the nation's airspace. But if they trust the F.A.A. to regulate safety, why not let the agency operate air traffic control as it has for decades? It makes no sense to remake a system that is not broken.

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