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United States Senate
COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION
WASHINGTON, DC 20510–6125
WEBSITE: https://commerce.senate.gov

November 16, 2026

The Honorable Sean Duffy
Secretary
United States Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave SE
Washington, DC 20590

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

Dear Secretary Duffy and Administrator Bedford,

The November 13 nationwide ground stop disrupted air travel across the country, eroded public trust in our aviation system, and raised serious questions about the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) ability to ensure reliable and resilient operations. Congress expects clear, fact-based answers about the root cause of this disruption and why existing safeguards failed to prevent it. The Department of Transportation (DOT) and FAA must explain how this failure occurred and identify the corrective actions and oversight needed to prevent a recurrence.

Based on information provided to our offices from L3 Harris, the copper-to-fiber transition involves converting 3,648 routers to Juniper devices. To date, it is our understanding that 400 devices have been installed, and 69 are operational. With thousands of conversions remaining, FAA must address outstanding safety and reliability concerns before expanding installation.

Identifying the device that failed does not establish *why* it failed. FAA must investigate further to determine the root cause and report to Congress on how it intends to prevent future issues.

We understand the FAA Technical Center tested a sample of Juniper devices before installation. The devices passed pre-deployment testing. The November 13 failure raises serious questions about whether that testing adequately reflected operating conditions or evaluated all potential failure modes or outcomes.

We request an immediate pause on the deployment of additional Juniper devices. Deployment should resume after the FAA demonstrates the devices' readiness for safe deployment through improved operational testing, independent validation, verified failover capability, and rollback procedures. Congress expects a briefing on these improvements before the FAA resumes deployment of the routers.

The ground stop demonstrated a breakdown in a system Americans rely on, and Congress was left to piece together critical facts. We expect accurate information as soon as it is available. Concerningly, the DOT attributed the November 13 network disruption to "old switches [and]

old routers," when in fact the deployment of the new Juniper routers seem to be the problem. This discrepancy between the FAA's contractor and the DOT further fuels our concern that the root cause of the disruption has not yet been identified, leaving the potential for another failure.

The DOT and FAA have assigned blame to L3 Harris and used this moment to call for $50 billion in funding for Brand New Air Traffic Control System (BNATCS). This is notably $20 billion more than the request from DOT and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) that was sent on Thursday, November 12. DOT, FAA and OMB must provide Congress with a complete account of what happened and how additional funding would address the vulnerabilities presented on November 13. DOT and FAA must also take full responsibility for managing contractors working to modernize the NAS.

Congress deserves clear answers on how the FAA is ensuring the safety of the aviation system for the traveling public while these new systems are being deployed.

Further, we request a joint technical briefing with FAA, L3Harris, and Juniper, and the following information no later than November 23, 2026:

1. An initial safety assessment of operational Juniper devices in the NAS, identifying shared infrastructure dependencies and common points of failures, vulnerabilities in primary and backup telecommunications paths, and the adequacy of failover, rollback, and recovery procedures.
2. An explanation of why the FAA's operational systems lacked sufficient redundancy to recover immediately from the November 13 outage.
3. An explanation of how a cut fiber-optic line or other localized telecommunications failure could result in widespread operational disruption, including actions taken to reinforce network redundancy following the Philadelphia Terminal Radar Approach Control and Minneapolis Air Route Traffic Control Center outages.

Given recent events, Congress is concerned about the FAA's oversight of the BNATCS program. Modernization cannot come at the expense of operational safety. We expect a prompt response and look forward to working with the FAA to ensure the safety, reliability, and resilience of the NAS.

We are grateful for the air traffic controllers, pilots, flight attendants, and all aviation workers who continue to be impacted by Friday's events.

Sincerely,

Maria Cantwell
United States Senator
Ranking Member, Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

Tammy Duckworth
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Aviation, Space and Innovation
Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation

Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

Brian Schatz
United States Senator

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

Gary C. Peters
United States Senator

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

Jacky Rosen
United States Senator

Ben Ray Luján
United States Senator

John Hickenlooper
United States Senator

John Fetterman
United States Senator

Andy Kim
United States Senator

Lisa Blunt Rochester
United States Senator