Introducing the ACS

Airman Certification Standards

Federal Aviation Administration

Presented by: FAA Flight Standards Service

Date: January 2015

The purpose of this briefing is twofold.

- First is to provide basic information on a new, industry-developed Airman Certification Standards framework that will eventually supersede the Practical Test Standards.

- Second is to offer an opportunity to provide comments and ask questions while the ACS project is still in the development and testing phase. At the end of this presentation is a slide listing FAA Headquarters contact information and additional sources of information on this project.

Airman Certification Requirements

- For each airman certificate or rating, 14 CFR lists required areas of *aeronautical knowledge* and *flight proficiency*.
  - FAA developed the PTS to provide practical test performance metrics for flight proficiency in each Area of Operation and Task.
    - In addition, each PTS now includes a lengthy list of largely undefined “special emphasis” areas.
  - There has never been a corresponding set of defined “KTS” (knowledge test standards) metrics for the aeronautical knowledge elements tested via “the written” exam.

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First, let’s talk about why this project got started.

- As you know, 14 CFR lists required areas of *aeronautical knowledge* and *flight proficiency* for each pilot or instructor certificate and rating.
- Years ago, the FAA developed the Practical Test Standards (PTS) to provide practical test performance metrics for flight proficiency in each Area of Operation and Task.
- The PTS replaced the previous “flight test guides,” with the goal of ensuring a standardized approach to the practical test.
- The PTS is still a very solid and sound approach. Over time, though, the PTS has acquired a number of “barnacles” – things like overlapping or duplicative tasks, and a long and growing list of largely undefined “special emphasis” items in the introductory material.
- There has never been a corresponding set of defined “KTS” (knowledge test standards) metrics for the aeronautical knowledge elements tested via “the written” exam.

Rationale for Change

- Lack of a “KTS” has allowed the accumulation of too many FAA knowledge test questions that are:
  - Out-of-date (e.g., lots of NDB, not much RNAV)
  - Overly complex (e.g., multiple interpolations required to calculate a two-knot difference in wind speed or landing distance within three feet (?!)
  - Irrelevant (e.g., number of satellites in the GPS constellation)
  - Disconnected from “real” skills and knowledge required for safe operation in today’s NAS.

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- The lack of a “KTS” to define and standardize aeronautical knowledge and risk management elements in the way that the PTS defines performance metrics for flight proficiency has created the situation we have today.
- The FAA knowledge test gets sharp criticism because it includes far too many questions that are:
  - Out-of-date (e.g., lots of NDB, not much RNAV)
  - Overly complex (e.g., multiple interpolations required to calculate a two-knot difference in wind speed or landing distance within three feet (?!)
  - Irrelevant (e.g., number of satellites in the GPS constellation)
  - Disconnected from “real” skills and knowledge required for safe operation in today’s NAS.

From PTS to ACS

- In 2012, an FAA-chartered Aviation Rulemaking Committee (ARC) proposed the ACS approach.
- **A**irman **C**ertification **S**tandards
  - "Enhanced" version of the PTS
  - Adds task-specific knowledge and risk management elements to each PTS Area of Operation and Task.
  - Result = holistic, integrated presentation of specific knowledge, skills, and risk management elements and performance metrics for each Area of Operation and Task.

- To address these issues, the FAA wanted to get input from a diverse group of aviation community experts in aviation training and testing.
- So – in 2011, the FAA chartered an Aviation Rulemaking Committee (ARC) to look at the situation and make recommendations on how the FAA could improve its approach to knowledge testing, which heavily influences the way industry prepares and uses aviation training materials.
- The members of the Aviation Rulemaking Committee (AOPA, SAFE, NAFI, GAMA, NATA, Jeppesen, Sporty's, Gleim, King Schools, ASA, and others) submitted their recommendations to the FAA in 2012.
- The heart of their proposal was for the FAA to consider the Airman Certification Standards (ACS) approach.
- Key points about the ACS:
  - The ACS is essentially an "enhanced" version of the PTS
  - The ACS adds task-specific knowledge and risk management elements to each PTS Area of Operation and Task.
  - The result is a holistic, integrated presentation of specific knowledge, skills, and risk management elements and performance metrics for each Area of Operation and Task.

What is the ACS?

Private Pilot – Airplane Airman Certification Standards
Airplane—Single Engine, Multi Engine Land and Sea Areas of Operation

V. Performance Maneuvers

ACS

PTS

Task	***A. Steep Turns***	
Reference	FAA-H-8083-2, FAA-H-8083-3; POH/AFM	
Objective	To determine that the applicant exhibits satisfactory knowledge, skills and risk management associated with steep turns.	
Knowledge	The applicant demonstrates understanding of:	
	1. Coordinated flight.	PA.V.A.K1
	2. Attitude control at various airspeeds.	PA.V.A.K2
	3. Maneuvering speed, including changes in weight.	PA.V.A.K3
	4. Controlling rate and radius of turn.	PA.V.A.K4
	5. Accelerated stalls.	PA.V.A.K5
	6. Overbanking tendencies.	PA.V.A.K6
	7. Use of trim in a turn.	PA.V.A.K7
	8. Aerodynamics associated with steep turns.	PA.V.A.K8
	9. Aerobatic requirements and limitations.	PA.V.A.K9
Skills	The applicant demonstrates the ability to:	
	1. Establish the manufacturer's recommended airspeed or if one is not stated, a safe airspeed not to exceed V_A.	PA.V.A.S1
	2. Rolls into a coordinated 360° steep turn with at least a 45° bank, followed immediately by a 360° steep turn in the opposite direction.	PA.V.A.S2
	3. Perform the task in the opposite direction, as specified by the evaluator.	PA.V.A.S3
	4. Maintain the entry altitude, ±100 feet, airspeed, ±10 knots, bank, and ±5°; and roll out on the entry heading, ±10°.	PA.V.A.S4
Risk Management	The applicant demonstrates the ability to identify, assess and mitigate risks, encompassing:	
	1. Dividing attention between airplane control and orientation.	PA.V.A.R1
	2. Task management.	PA.V.A.R2
	3. Energy management.	PA.V.A.R3
	4. Stall/spin awareness.	PA.V.A.R4
	5. Situational awareness.	PA.V.A.R5
	6. Collision avoidance to include clearing the area.	PA.V.A.R6

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- Here's what it looks like on the current draft Airman Certification Standards document for Private Pilot Airplane.
- The "skills" section of the ACS covers the flight proficiency performance metrics in today's PTS.
- For each PTS Area of Operation/Task, the ACS lists the elements of aeronautical knowledge that support that skill.
- In addition, for each PTS Area of Operation/Task, the ACS lists the risk management elements or behaviors associated with it.

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Aeronautical knowledge

Flight proficiency

Aeronautical decision-making and special emphasis

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The integrated ACS presentation helps applicants, instructors, and evaluators understand how knowledge, skills, and risk management are connected for any given Area of Operation/Task.

Another benefit comes from defining some of the terms and concepts now presented as abstract “special emphasis” words in the PTS introduction, and placing them in the right context.

The presentation of risk management enhances safety, and it can also contribute to much greater standardization in teaching and testing these concepts. That result benefits applicants, instructors, and evaluators.

What is the ACS?

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- ACS also includes unique codes for each element of knowledge, skill, and risk management.

PA = Private Pilot Airplane (*defines applicable ACS*)

V = Performance Maneuvers (*defines Area of Operation*)

A = Steep Turns (*defines Task*)

K5 = Accelerated Stalls (*defines element*)

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- One of the strongest tools that our industry team developed for the Airman Certification Standards framework is a new coding system.

- As you can see on the slide, the ACS assigns a unique and very intuitive code to each element of knowledge, skill, and risk management.

- Let's take a look at what PA.V.A.K5 means:

  - **PA** = Private Pilot Airplane (*defines applicable ACS*)
  - **V** = Performance Maneuvers (*defines Area of Operation*)
  - **A** = Steep Turns (*defines Task*)
  - **K5** = Accelerated Stalls (*defines element*)

What is the ACS?

- ACS codes will replace Learning Statement Codes (LSCs).
- ACS codes are anchored in the *standard*, not in references like LSCs.
- ACS codes enable FAA to align standards to handbooks and test questions, to maintain that alignment, and to develop better test questions.
- ACS codes provide sharper, more focused feedback to applicants, instructors, and evaluators.

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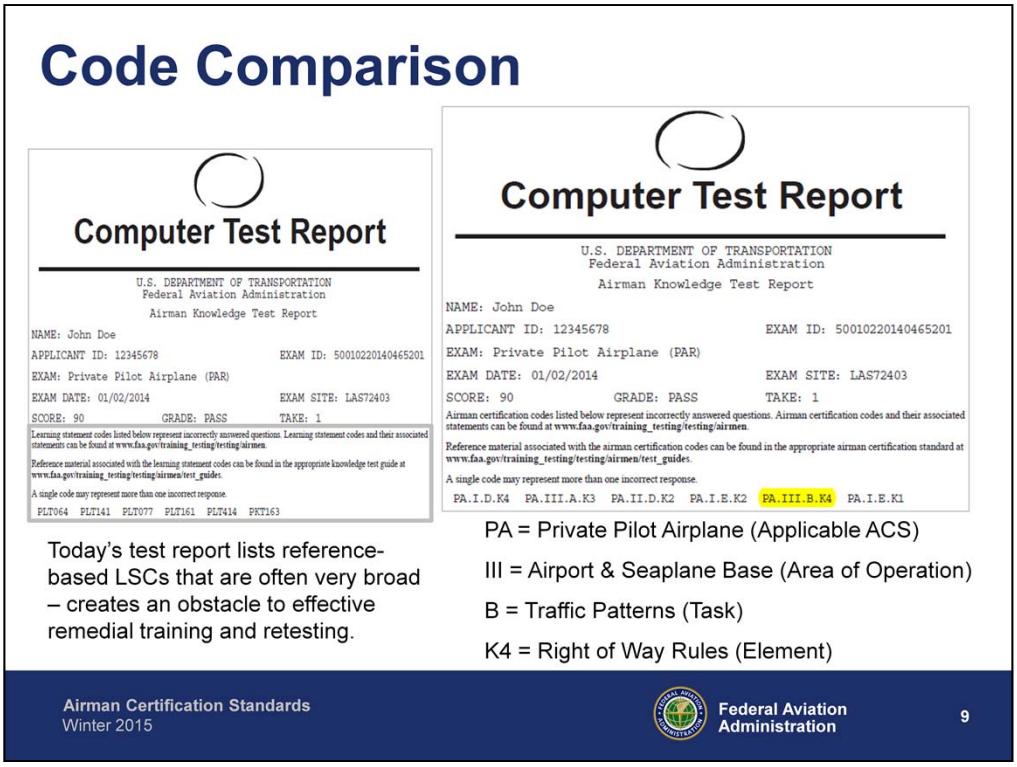
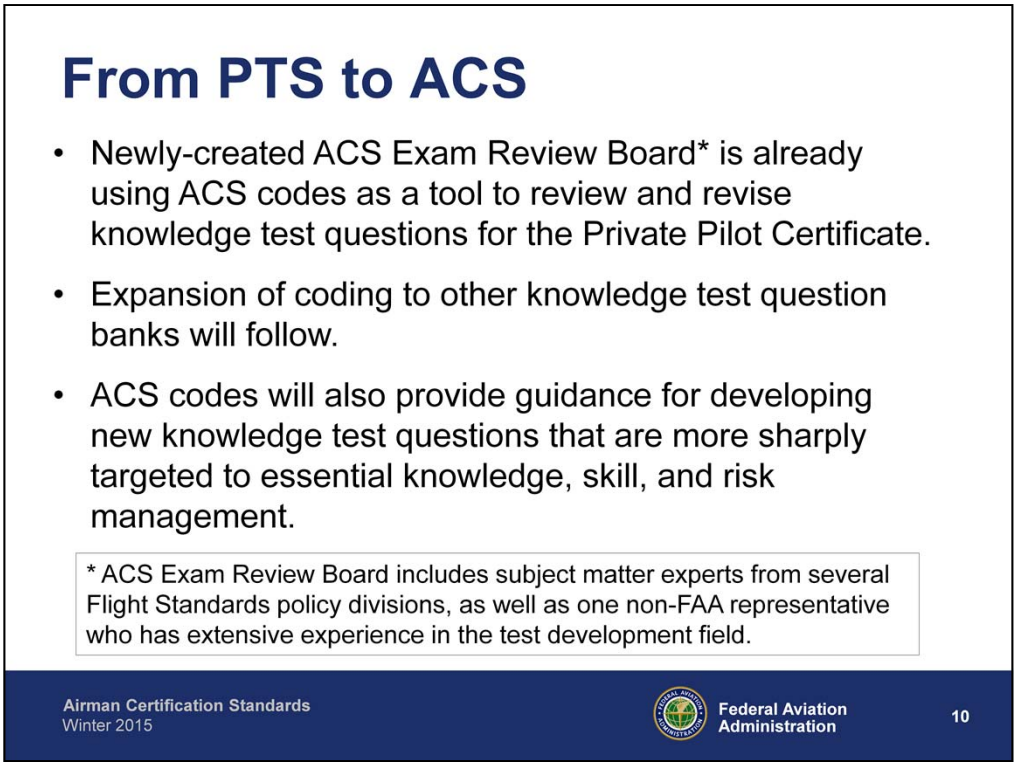
- When the Airman Certification Standards approach is implemented, ACS codes will replace the Learning Statement Codes (LSCs) that are used right now.
- The ACS codes have several very strong advantages over the Learning Statement Codes.
- First, the ACS codes are anchored in the standard – not in handbooks and other reference documents, like today's Learning Statement Codes.
- Second, the ACS codes enable the FAA to align standards to handbooks and test questions, to maintain that alignment, and to develop better test questions.
    - A subject matter expert (SME) team consisting of representatives from several headquarters policy divisions is already using the ACS codes to review, revise and – in some cases, eliminate – knowledge test questions. This process will ensure that each knowledge test question has a real purpose, and that has a clear link to standards and guidance.
- Third, ACS codes provide sharper, more focused feedback to applicants, instructors, and evaluators. The next slide provides a strong visual example of how that will work in the real world.



Here's the example.

- When an applicant finishes the knowledge test today, he or she gets a computer test report that looks like the example on the left. The Learning Statement Codes are on the bottom of the form, and they are intended to show the areas of knowledge the applicant missed on the test.
- To decipher the codes, the applicant, the instructor, and eventually the evaluator have to go to a separate publication and look up the codes. The codes are numerous, and some of them are overlapping. They are assigned somewhat subjectively, and they point to a broad area in one or more FAA reference documents. That makes it hard for ensure effective remedial training.
- In the ACS world, though, the Computer Test Report will list very specific ACS codes. For example, PA.III.B.K4 tells the applicant, the instructor, and the evaluator that there is a need to focus more on right of way rules.
    - PA = Private Pilot Airplane (Applicable ACS)
    - III = Airport & Seaplane Base (Area of Operation)
    - B = Traffic Patterns (Task)
    - K4 = Right of Way Rules (Element)
- The ACS codes (the "S" codes for skills) will eventually be provided on the practical test Notice of Disapproval to show deficient skills.



The newly-created ACS Exam Review Board* is already using ACS codes as a tool to review and revise knowledge test questions for the Private Pilot Certificate.

Expansion of coding to other knowledge test question banks will follow.

ACS codes will also provide guidance for developing new knowledge test questions that are more sharply targeted to essential knowledge, skill, and risk management.

* ACS Exam Review Board includes subject matter experts from AFS-200 (Air Transportation Division), AFS-400 (Flight Technologies & Procedures Division), AFS-800 (General Aviation & Commercial Division), and AFS-600 (Regulatory Support Division). It also includes one non-FAA representative who has extensive experience in the test development field.

Project History

Phase I – 2011-2012:

- The ARC (Aviation Rulemaking Committee)
  - FAA chartered Airman Testing Standards and Training ARC to obtain expert industry stakeholder advice and recommendations for improving content, process, methodology, and priorities for improving airman knowledge testing.
  - The ARC developed the ACS concept and recommended that the FAA pursue it.

A Report from the
Airman Testing Standards and Training
Aviation Rulemaking Committee
to the
Federal Aviation Administration

Recommendations to Enhance the Airman Knowledge Test Content and Its Processes and Methodologies for Training and Testing

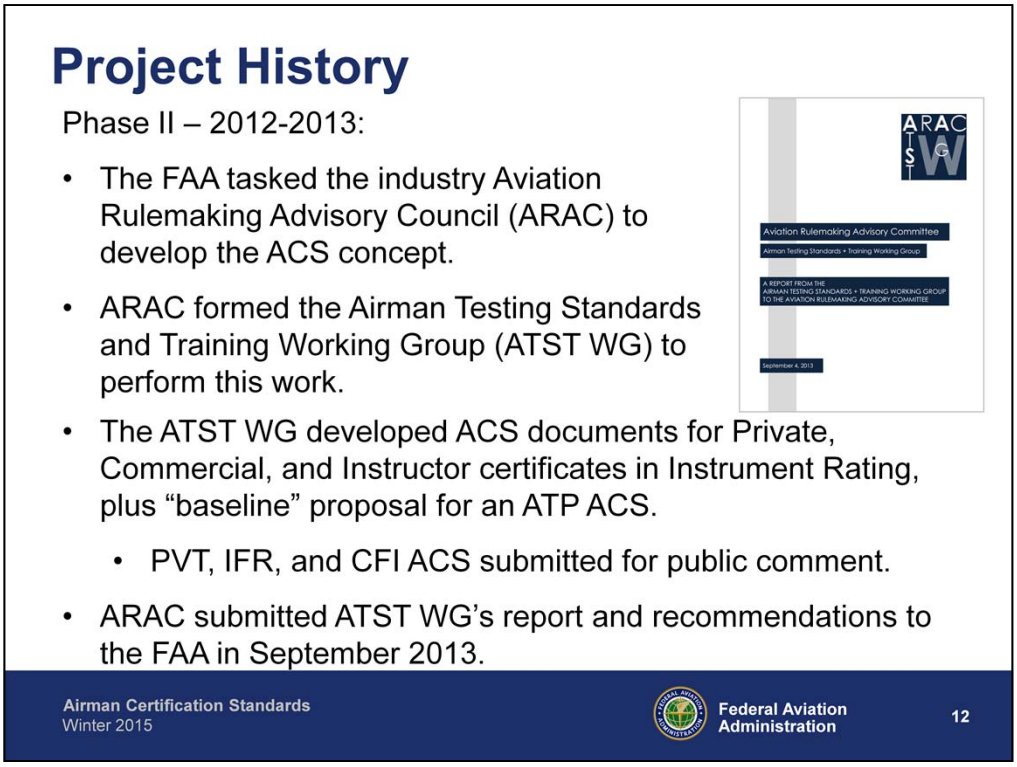
April 15, 2012

Before we close this introduction to the Airman Certification Standards, here's a brief overview of how it started, and where it is going.

- Phase I – 2011-2012: The FAA chartered the first industry stakeholder group in the form of an Aviation Rulemaking Committee, or ARC. ARCs are the accepted structure for rulemaking projects, but they are also used as a legitimate and transparent way for the FAA to benefit from stakeholder expertise.

- The FAA asked the Aviation Rulemaking Committee to make recommendations on improving the content, process, methodology, and priorities for improving airman knowledge testing.

- The members of the Aviation Rulemaking Committee developed the Airman Certification Standards concept and recommended that the FAA pursue it.



- The FAA reviewed the recommendations from the Aviation Rulemaking Committee and accepted almost all of them. (Note: The only one NOT accepted was a recommendation for the FAA to return all knowledge test questions to the public domain, as they once were.)
- Phase II – 2012-2013: In the second phase of this project, the FAA turned to the Aviation Rulemaking Advisory Council – ARAC – for help. ARAC is an "umbrella" body that provides a transparent legal framework for industry stakeholders to provide advice and recommendations to the FAA.
- ARAC includes a very diverse group of industry experts. When the FAA asks ARAC to accept an assignment or task, ARAC forms a working group of experts to perform that assignment or task.
- In this case, the FAA asked the Aviation Rulemaking Advisory Council to develop the ACS concept. To complete this assignment, ARAC formed the Airman Testing Standards and Training Working Group (ATST WG).
- The Airman Testing Standards and Training Working Group (which included some members of the original Aviation Rulemaking Committee, plus several new members) developed ACS documents for Private, Commercial, and Instructor certificates in Instrument Rating. The Working Group also created a "baseline" proposal for an ATP ACS.
    - On behalf of the Working Group, the FAA twice established dockets to receive public feedback on the draft PVT, IFR, and CFI ACS.
- The Working Group submitted its report to its parent body, the Aviation Rulemaking Advisory Committee, and ARAC submitted that report to the FAA in

September 2013.

Project History

Phase III – 2014-2015:

- The FAA tasked the industry Aviation Rulemaking Advisory Council (ARAC) to further advance the ACS concept.
- In March 2014, ARAC formed the Airman Certification System Working Group (ACS WG) to perform this work.
- Ongoing tasks:
  - Refine & complete ACS for COM, ATP, and CFI.
  - Help FAA map standards to guidance.
  - Prototype use of PVT (PAR) ACS in Orlando area, with strong support from AFS-800 (policy memo) and ORL FSDO (assisting with ACS WG efforts).

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That brings us to where we are today.

- Phase III – 2014-2015: Once the FAA reviewed the report created by the Aviation Rulemaking Advisory Council's Airman Testing Standards and Training Working Group, the agency decided it was time to take the next step.
- So – the FAA went back to the Aviation Rulemaking Advisory Council and asked ARAC to help us implement the Working Group's recommendations for adopting the ACS concept.
- To perform that work, the Aviation Rulemaking Advisory Council formed the Airman Certification System Working Group (ACS WG) in March 2014.
- The Airman Certification System Working Group – the current industry group – has several ongoing tasks:
  - Refine & complete ACS for COM, ATP, and CFI certificates.
  - Help the FAA map standards to guidance.
  - Prototype use of Private Pilot Airplane ACS in the Orlando area, with strong support from AFS-800 and the ORL FSDO.
    - AFS-800 provided a policy memo authorizing use of the ACS in lieu of the PTS on the practical test.
    - The Orlando FSDO is providing assistance to, and oversight of, the industry's prototyping projects in that area.

Project History

Phase III – 2014-2015

- Prototyping:
  - Initial effort with ERAU Summer Academy – June 2014; positive feedback from instructors, evaluators, and ORL FSDO inspectors. Collecting student feedback now.
  - ACS WG and ORL FSDO are collaborating on a larger prototype to include part 61 instructors, applicants, and DPEs. Goal is to develop foundation for future 8900 guidance and ACS job aids.
  - Exploring prototype expansion to ASW and/or AWP in 2015, with a view to "real" implementation of ACS for PVT, IFR, COM, & CFI in late 2015/early 2016.

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More on the work in Phase III – 2014-2015

- Prototyping is a very important part of the effort. Both the FAA and the industry experts who developed the Airman Certification Standards approach are anxious to make sure it works in the "real world" before introducing it as the new testing and training standard.
- Prototype efforts started in the summer of 2014, with a small Private Pilot Airplane certification course at the Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University's Summer Academy program in Daytona Beach.
- This course was too small to draw broad conclusions, but everyone involved reacted positively. Instructors, evaluators, and ORL FSO inspectors all found the ACS to be a significant improvement over the current approach.
- ERAU is trying to collect student feedback as well – that was delayed by the need for parental permission and university review board approval.
- This fall, the Airman Certification System Working Group members and the assigned ORL FSDO inspectors are collaborating on a larger prototype to include part 61 instructors, applicants, and DPEs.
- The goal is to develop the framework and foundation for future 8900 guidance, ACS job aids, and guidance/standardization training for FAA designated pilot examiners (DPEs).
- If all goes well, the FAA and industry will explore expanding the Private Pilot Airplane prototype to one or two other regions in 2015, and let the ORL FSDO prototype the IFR and Authorized Instructor ACS documents.

- The goal is to be ready for “real” implementation of ACS for PVT, IFR, COM, and CFI in late 2015/early 2016.

Key Points

- *The ACS does not change the checkride*, but it gives the evaluator more focused information on:
  - Knowledge and risk management and special emphasis elements associated with each skill task.
  - Specific information (via ACS codes) on items the applicant missed on the knowledge test.
- Except to streamline and combine overlapping and duplicative tasks (e.g., runway safety), *the ACS does not change PTS elements or performance metrics*.
- The FAA reviews each industry-developed ACS to validate its content and ensure that all PTS elements are included.

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- It is important for everyone to understand several key points.
- First*, the ACS does not change the checkride*, and it does not make the checkride any longer than it takes to conduct a PTS checkride today.
- However, the ACS does give the evaluator more focused information on:
  - Knowledge and risk management and special emphasis elements associated with each skill task.
    - Expectation is for evaluator to address ONE knowledge element and ONE risk management element in each Task.
    - Evaluator has discretion to address additional knowledge and risk management elements if airman knowledge test report and/or applicant response(s) to questions suggest the need for more thorough coverage.
  - Specific information (via ACS codes) on items the applicant missed on the knowledge test.
- Second, except to streamline and combine overlapping and duplicative tasks (e.g., runway safety), *the ACS does not change PTS elements or performance metrics*.
  - A team of FAA subject matter experts from all the key headquarters policy divisions carefully reviews each industry-developed ACS to validate its content, and ensure that all PTS elements are included.

Key Points

By offering an integrated, holistic, and systematic approach to standards, guidance, and testing, the ACS:

- Provides better guidance to applicants, instructors, evaluators, and inspectors.
- Allows the FAA to develop better test questions that are clearly tied to standards (“need to know”) and supported by guidance (handbooks).
- Reduces subjectivity and increases system-wide standardization.
- Enhances safety by ensuring that standards, guidance and testing for airman certification all work together effectively.

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More potential benefits from the ACS include the following:

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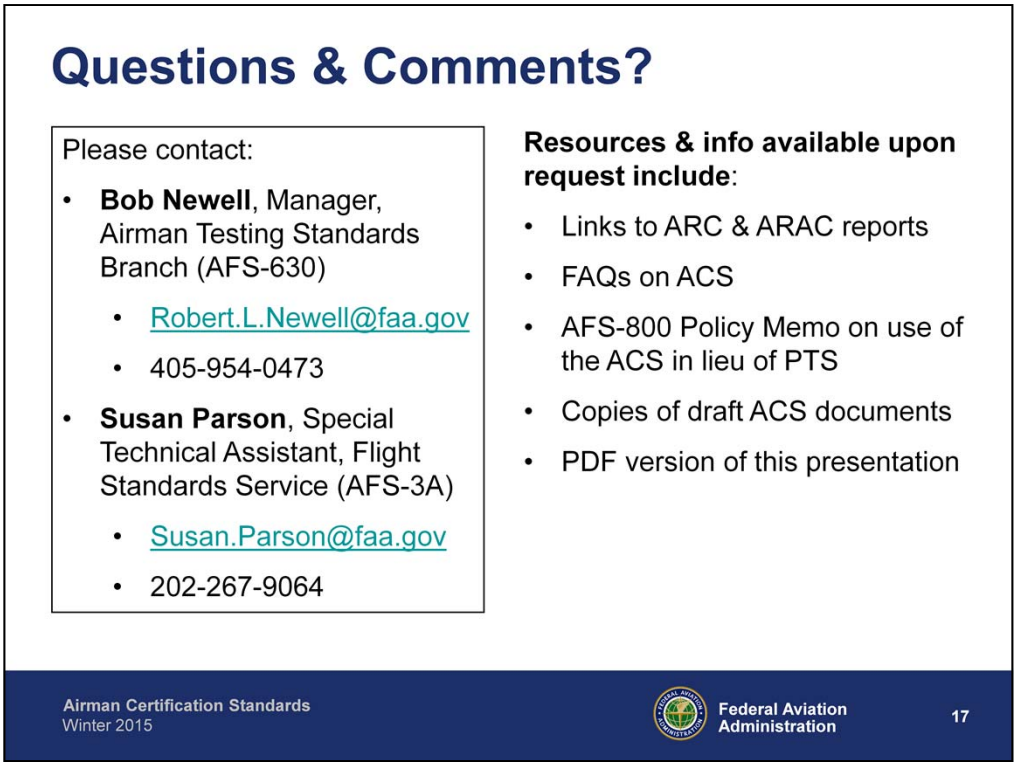

Questions and comments are welcomed and strongly encouraged. Both the FAA personnel assigned to this project and the industry experts who created the ACS are very eager to benefit from the field ASI perspective.

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Resources & info available upon request include:

- Links to ARC & ARAC reports
- FAQs on ACS
- AFS-800 Policy Memo on use of the ACS in lieu of PTS
- Copies of draft ACS documents
- PDF version of this presentation