FORECASTS OF IFR AIRCRAFT HANDLED BY FAA AIR ROUTE TRAFFIC CONTROL CENTERS FY 2025-2050

FORECAST SUMMARY

This report provides forecasts of Instrument Flight Rule (IFR) aircraft handled by individual Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Air Route Traffic Control Centers (ARTCC). These forecasts serve as a base for the FAA planning and budget process in determining future requirements for facilities, equipment, and manpower. Same as in prior years, the forecasts consider the effects from the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and the path to recovery in the near term back to pre-COVID-19 levels. In addition, the near-term forecasts reflect recent economic trends such as the higher inflation relative to the historical levels, higher interest rates, and other implications such as rising energy prices.

In FY 2024, traffic at the 25 ARTCCs increased 3.7 percent from FY 2023. The 3.7 percent increase in FY2024 was largely reflective of commercial traffic (air carrier plus air taxi/commuter) since the nature of ARTCC traffic is overwhelmingly commercial. Approximately 82.5 percent of the traffic was commercial in FY2024. General aviation traffic fell by 2.7 percent from FY2023 to FY2024, following an 8.1 percent decrease in traffic in FY 2023.

At the national level, ARTCC traffic returned to FY2019 levels in FY2024. The relatively short recovery timeline was mainly driven by robust demand in the domestic leisure markets as well as rebounding international demand in Latin and Atlantic markets. However, the speed of the recovery varies by individual center. While many centers (a total of 13) in FY 2024 saw activity at or exceeding pre-COVID levels, traffic at some centers will take longer to return to pre-COVID-19 levels.

General aviation traffic initially was much more resilient to the COVID-19 downturn and had a much quicker recovery relative to the commercial traffic. General aviation aircraft handled had surpassed FY2019 levels in FY 2022 but then fell in both FY 2023 and FY 2024, while commercial traffic grew. In FY 2024, commercial traffic was 101 percent of pre-COVID-19 levels. In contrast, general aviation traffic was 99.6 percent of pre-COVID levels.

During the 25-year forecast period, the number of aircraft handled is forecast to increase 1.7 percent annually, from 44.7 million aircraft handled in 2025 to 67.7 million in 2050. The largest increase occurs in the commercial aircraft handled category. This category of aircraft is forecast to increase from 36.9 million aircraft handled in 2025 to 58.6 million in 2050 at an average annual growth rate of 1.9 percent. General aviation aircraft handled are forecast to increase at a rate of 0.7 percent annually, totaling 7.7 million aircraft handled in 2050. Military aircraft handled are forecast to hold steady at 2024 levels and total 1.4 million in 2050.

A summary of projected IFR aircraft handled for individual centers is in the “summary” tab in the Excel file, which is located next to the ARTCC Forecasts PDF document on

the FAA website (https://www.faa.gov/data_research/aviation/aerospace_forecasts/). The Excel file also includes forecasts of the number of IFR aircraft handled (defined as two times IFR departures plus IFR overflights, by user group (commercial, general aviation, and military)), for each of the 24 centers and Guam. Finally, summary tables are provided for each of the Air Traffic Organization (ATO) service areas, including central, eastern, and western regions. These tables contain historical data for the period FY 1990 through FY 2024 and forecasts for FY 2025 through FY 2050.