



FORECASTS OF IFR AIRCRAFT
HANDLED BY FAA AIR ROUTE
TRAFFIC CONTROL CENTERS
FY 2023-2050

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 last year, this year's forecasts consider the effects from the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and the recovery growth in the near term in order for the traffic to reach the pre-COVID-19 level. In addition, the near term forecasts reflect the recent economic and political shocks such as the higher inflation relative to the historical levels, higher interest rates, the Ukraine/Russia conflict, and other implications such as rising energy prices.

In FY2022, traffic at the 25 ARTCCs increased 22 percent from FY2021, a robust recovery following the 6 percent modest recovery from FY2020 to FY2021. The 22 percent increase in FY2022 was largely reflective of commercial traffic (air carrier plus air taxi/commuter) since the nature of ARTCC traffic is overwhelmingly commercial. Approximately 80 percent of the traffic was commercial in FY2022. General aviation traffic experienced 15 percent growth from FY2021 to FY2022, following a 20 percent increase in traffic in FY2021.

Same as last year's ARTCC forecasts, this year's forecasts provide estimates on when the traffic will return to pre-COVID-19 levels. At the national level, ARTCC traffic is expected to return to FY2019 levels by FY2023, which is the same recovery timeline as predicted last year. The relatively short recovery timeline is mainly driven by the robust demand in the domestic leisure markets starting in the early spring of 2021 and continuing through the winter months of 2021 and early 2022. International travel started to pick up speed in the spring and summer of 2022. However, the speed of the recovery varies by individual center. While many centers are expected to recover by FY2023, traffic at some centers will take longer to return to pre-COVID-19 levels.

General aviation traffic has shown to be much more resilient to the downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the recovery has been swift relative to the commercial traffic. In FY2022, general aviation aircraft handled had surpassed FY2019 levels when combining traffic from all 25 ARTCCs, while the commercial traffic was at 92% of the pre-COVID-19 level. Due to the relatively slower recovery speed of commercial traffic, the share of general aviation aircraft handled at all 25 ARTCCs is increasing, from 14 percent in FY2019 to 17 percent in FY2022.

During the 28-year forecast period, the number of aircraft handled is forecast to increase 2.1 percent annually, from 41.4 million aircraft handled in 2022 to 74.4 million in 2050. The largest increase occurs in the commercial aircraft handled category. This category of aircraft is forecast to increase from 32.9 million aircraft handled in 2022 to 64.4 million in 2050 at an average annual growth rate of approximately 2.4 percent. General aviation aircraft handled are forecast to increase at a rate of 0.68 percent annually, totaling 8.5

million aircraft handled in 2050. Military aircraft handled are forecast to hold steady at 2022 levels and total 1.5 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 2022 and forecasts for FY 2023 through FY 2050.