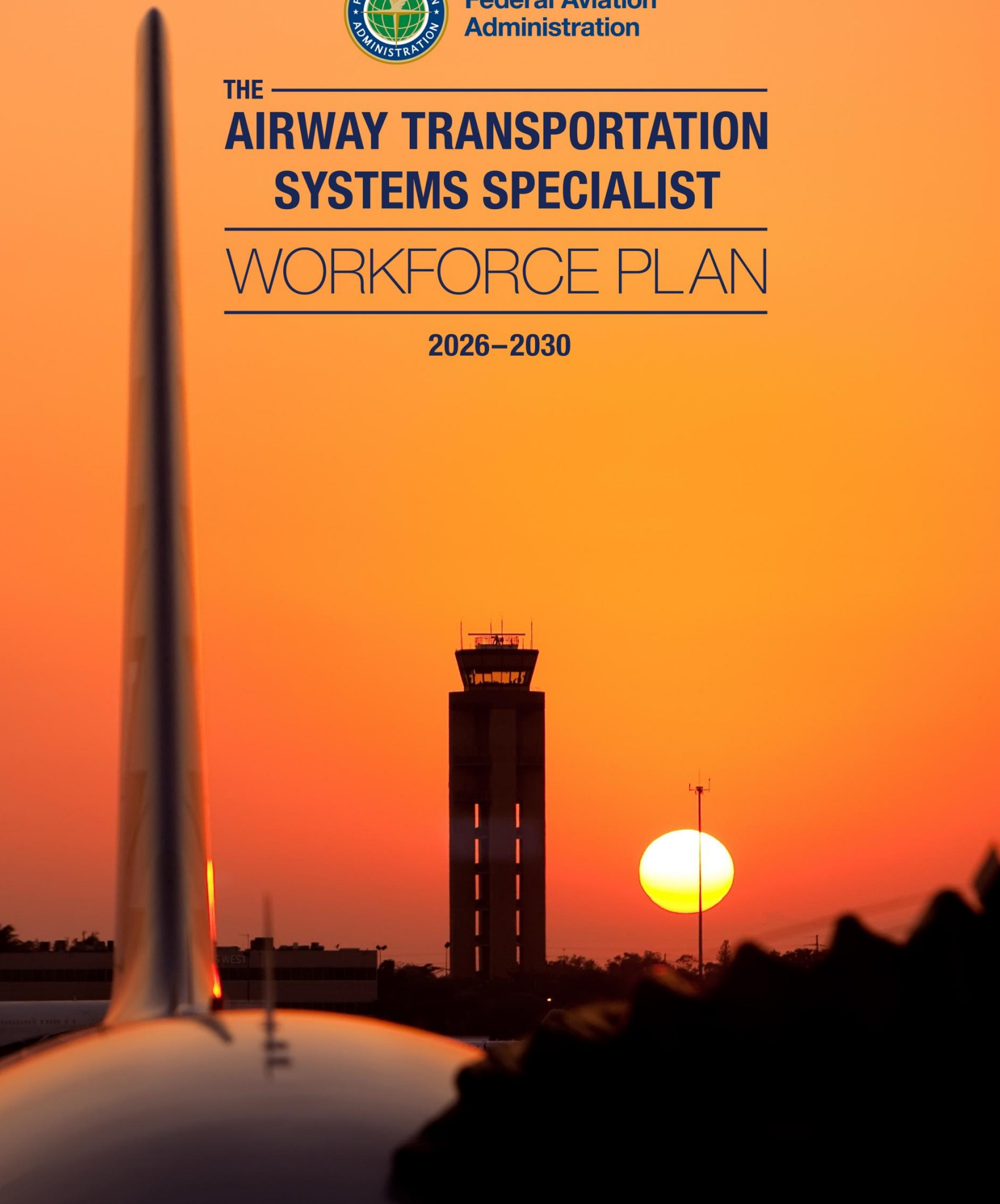
Federal Aviation Administration

THE AIRWAY TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS SPECIALIST WORKFORCE PLAN

2026–2030



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2026 (Pub. L. No. 119-75) requires the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Administrator to transmit a report to the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation and the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure that describes the Airway Transportation Systems Specialist (ATSS) Workforce Plan. The FAA is an operating administration of the U.S. Department of Transportation. This document presents the first comprehensive ATSS Workforce Plan. It outlines key information relevant to external stakeholders, and it serves as a foundational guide for the year ahead. The Workforce Plan includes estimated staffing forecasts for the ATSS series, as well as actual onboard levels as of September 2025 (pay period 20).

Safety is the top priority of the FAA as it manages America's National Airspace System (NAS). The FAA mission is to provide the safest, most efficient aerospace system in the world and to encourage global aerospace excellence. The NAS is the common network of U.S. airspace air navigation facilities, equipment, and services; airports and landing areas; aeronautical charts, information, and services; rules, regulations, and procedures; technical information; and staffing resources and material.

Thanks to the expertise of people and the support of technology, tens of thousands of aircraft are guided safely through the NAS to their destinations every day. ATSSs play a critical role in NAS safety, maintaining and certifying the air traffic control systems and navigational aids used by air traffic controllers and pilots.

For this plan, technicians are referred to in four different ways:

1. ATSS: Formal series title that captures all categories listed below.
2. Certified Professional Technician (CPT): Refers to a full performance level ATSS. CPTs:
    a. Install, maintain, repair, operate, and certify the hardware, software, and equipment that make up the NAS infrastructure.
    b. Maintain facilities, systems, and equipment categorized into one of five disciplines: Automation, Communication, Environmental, Navigational Aids, and Radar.
3. Developmental: Refers to a new ATSS who is still in the process of obtaining initial training and certifications. On average, it takes two years for a developmental ATSS to become a CPT.
4. Supervisors and Other Technicians: Refers to ATSSs who are in supervisory positions or who are not considered CPT or developmental.

Staffing Forecast

The FAA hires developmental ATSSs in advance of its staffing needs to ensure ample training time and to offset future attrition, including retirements, transfers, and training failures.

The FAA anticipates hiring approximately 2,400 new ATSSs through FY 2030, including 721 in FY 2026 and 541 in FY 2027, ensuring levels appropriate to sustain the legacy NAS and support the Brand New Air Traffic Control System (BNATCS).

Workforce Training and Development

The ATSS workforce is essential to the safety, efficiency, and security of the NAS. The FAA values a highly trained and skilled workforce. Therefore, technical training and development must be considered a critical factor when projecting staffing needs.

A properly trained workforce is just as critical as a properly sized workforce. Therefore, training requirements must be projected and planned concurrently with the hiring plan. Training requirements, at a minimum, consider the time it takes a newly hired developmental ATSS to complete formal training on multiple systems, safety training, and logging, and any required certifications and credentialing. On average, it takes two years for a developmental ATSS to become a CPT.

In addition to completing the formal training component, ATSSs require additional time to gain practical hands-on experience with systems and equipment, site-specific training and familiarization, and other mandatory courses required to become a CPT.

CHAPTER 1: STAFFING

The FAA runs a 24/7 operation responsible for safe travel and ensuring communications with over 520 Airport Traffic Control Towers, 21 Air Route Traffic Control Centers (ARTCC), and 147 Terminal Radar Approach Control Facilities (TRACON). The FAA radar, data automation, communications, navigational aids, and environmental systems provide services critical to the success and safety of the NAS. Among other functions, these services enable air traffic controllers to see and communicate with aircraft personnel, helping pilots navigate safely from takeoff to landing, keeping the NAS operating safely and efficiently for travelers and other stakeholders.

The ATSS workforce helps the FAA achieve its mission by effectively managing air navigation services, solutions, and infrastructure. The ATSS workforce installs, operates, maintains, monitors, and repairs approximately 74,000 pieces of aviation safety equipment located across the U.S. and outlying U.S. territories. In addition to installing and maintaining all equipment within the NAS, ATSSs play a crucial role in modernizing NAS infrastructure, managing NAS-related cybersecurity, and emergency response.

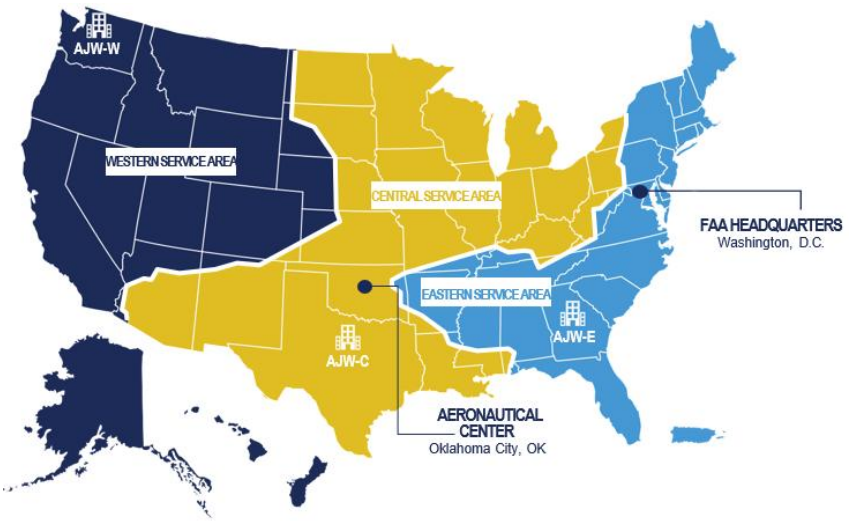
ATSS Overview

ATSSs act as the safe keeper of the systems and equipment in the NAS. The ATSS job requires a system-wide understanding of the facilities, services, and equipment required to maintain safe and efficient services in the NAS. ATSSs complete work across the country at several types of organizational units, including System Support Centers (SSC), Technical Services (TS), Service Operation Centers (SOC), and NAS Security and Enterprise Operations (NASEO).

System Support Center

ATSSs accomplish their core function at 393 SSC across the NAS. The SSCs are then grouped into 22 Districts across three Service Areas. These ATSSs verify, adjust, and certify every piece of equipment and service currently in the NAS to ensure safety, efficiency, and security. In addition, they ensure services do not degrade from installation through the lifecycle, ranging from the newest enterprise and electronic sensors to equipment and facilities designed in the 1960s.

Figure 1.1. Technical Operations Service Area Map



An SSC ATSS can specialize in one of five disciplines or be certified on any combination needed based on the SSC's equipment profile.

Figure 1.2. Five Disciplines

Environmental	Navigational Aids	Radar	Communications	Automation
Operation and maintenance of the physical facility, such as runway lighting systems, backup power systems, as well as heating, ventilation, and air conditioning.	Operation and maintenance of systems used for en route navigation and landing/approach guidance.	Operation and maintenance of air and ground-based radars.	Operation and maintenance of radio and telecommunication systems for communication between air traffic facilities and between controllers and pilots.	Operation and maintenance of the systems and displays used by air traffic controllers for monitoring aircraft.

SSC ATSSs deliver maintenance services and support in four types of work divisions. Listed below are the types of SSC work divisions. More than one type of work division may be co-located in the same building.

Table 1.1. SSC Work Divisions

Name	Description
ARTCC	Made up of several SSCs in discipline-specific combinations that focus on maintaining ARTCC-specific equipment.
TRACON	Made up of several SSCs in discipline-specific combinations that focus on maintaining TRACON-specific equipment.
Core Airports	Made up of several SSCs that focus on maintaining the equipment at the Nation's busiest airports.
General National Airspace System	Made up of SSCs that have a wide range of geographically designated responsibilities. This includes all work outside of the responsibility of the ARTCC, Large TRACON, or Core Airport work areas.

Work groups at the ARTCC, Large TRACON, and Core Airport facilities are comprised of shift workers who are assigned to watch schedules. These facilities are operational 24 hours a day, 7 days per week.

The SSCs are the typical entry point for most positions at the developmental ATSS level. On average, it takes about two years for a developmental ATSS to complete their new hire progression and become trained on at least one system, and even longer to be a certified watch standing technician capable of certification of multiple systems, or CPT. The technician workforce has a high degree of competence with current systems. As BNATCS technologies are deployed in the NAS, technicians will be trained and certified to support those new systems.

Technical Services

ATSSs in TS serve two separate functions. The first function, familiarly known as Technician in Depth (TID), provides second-level support, assisting with complex maintenance and restoration activities beyond the technical capability of the SSC ATSS. TIDs are grouped into 22 Technical Support Centers, providing support to the corresponding District.

The second TS ATSS function is the execution of the National Airspace System Technical Evaluation Program, providing technical evaluation of facilities, services, and maintenance processes to verify and improve FAA services. These ATSSs provide quality control services for the SSCs.

Service Operations Center

All ARTCCs and most Large TRACONs have a dedicated SOC. An ATSS at an SOC coordinates work activities and acts as the monitor and control point for all systems within the SOC's respective airspace boundary. Whereas an ATSS in an SSC provides localized support, an ATSS in an SOC provides a broader range of support. There are 29 SOCs located in the field - 22 SOCs are located at ARTCCs, and the remaining 7 are at Large TRACONs.

NAS Security and Enterprise Operations

ATSSs in NASEO provide safe, secure, and efficient flight services by maintaining NAS services, facilities, systems, and equipment in a responsive and cost-effective manner. NASEO ATSSs deliver services and support in four types of work divisions. Listed below are the types of work divisions. More than one type of work division may be co-located in the same building.

Table 1.2. NASEO Work Divisions

Name	Description
Operations Control Center (OCC)	Strategic and tactical control of NAS infrastructure, monitoring, and controlling NAS systems and services. There are three OCC locations nationwide.
National Enterprise Monitoring Center/National Operations Control Center	Manages and oversees the tactical delivery of NAS infrastructure services from a national perspective by providing 24/7 monitoring of the NAS infrastructure.
Wide Area Augmentation System (WAAS)	Manages WAAS operations and maintenance tasks, including service-provider partnerships and oversight.
Enterprise Control Center	Monitors and coordinates enterprise systems.

Work groups in these units are comprised of shift workers assigned to watch schedules. NASEO support is provided 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Charting the Path Forward

Hiring and training new ATSSs to full CPT is a continuous, multi-year process, and any disruptions can have significant, long-term impacts on future ATSS staffing levels.

Staffing shortfalls have resulted in longer restoration times and increased reliance on second-level support. Another consequence of these hiring and training setbacks is that an ATSS may not hold certifications for many of the systems that need maintenance in their geographical area (and

therefore are not yet at the CPT level), causing equipment to remain out of service longer while awaiting CPT availability. FAA is currently unable to staff all shifts at 67 facilities.

The FAA ATSS hiring plan is designed to phase in new hires over time. To do so, the FAA plans its hiring vacancy announcement strategy to provide a sufficient pipeline to meet hiring needs. This aids the ATSS staffing recovery and allows the FAA to hire developmental ATSSs in advance of its staffing needs, ensuring ample training time and offsetting future attrition, including retirements, transfers, and training failures.

As the ATSS workforce boosts its staffing levels, the organization must also contend with an increased workload to fix equipment in need of repair, which resulted in an average of 115 hours of overtime per ATSS in FY 2025 fixing aging equipment in addition to responding to emergencies such as weather events. These factors put the organization at risk of reduced equipment availability and reliability, which may negatively impact the safety of the NAS and may cause travel delays.

The ATSS workforce will be impacted by the development and implementation of BNATCS, underscoring the importance of maintaining healthy staffing levels. BNATCS provides the FAA with tremendous opportunities to strengthen the NAS and position the FAA for the future, increasing both efficiency and safety. However, BNATCS will also introduce a considerable shift in the responsibilities of ATSSs.

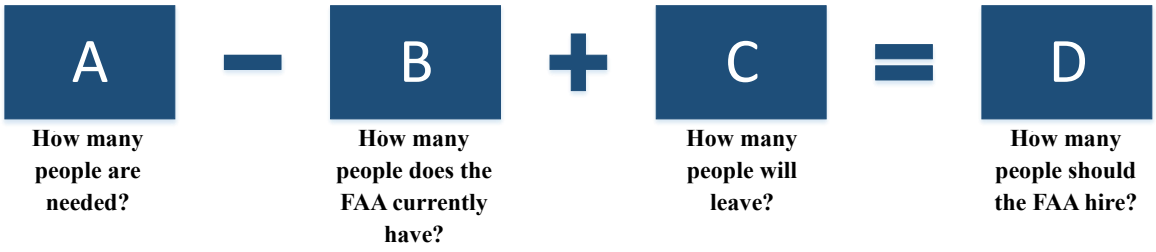
Initially, ATSSs face the challenge of assisting in the deployment and installation of new software and hardware. In addition, ATSSs will need extensive training to manage and optimize these new tools effectively. This will lead to increased workload, as ATSSs must maintain both legacy and new systems to ensure uninterrupted service to air traffic operations. This heightened demand amplifies the need for a robust staffing strategy. Ensuring a healthy staffing level not only facilitates a smoother transition to the new system but also empowers the FAA to leverage the full potential of its technological investments, ultimately enhancing air traffic management capabilities and safety outcomes.

Future changes to the NAS require the ATSS workforce to prepare for changes on the horizon. The aviation environment will continue to change rapidly due to new technologies and complex business models. Today's challenges include safely integrating emerging entrants into the NAS, including advanced air mobility aircraft, high-altitude unmanned aircraft systems, and commercial space operations.

ATSS Staffing Requirements

The workforce modeling framework below, when evaluated from left to right, uses (A) the number of ATSSs needed compared to (B) current staffing levels and (C) attrition to determine (D) the number of new hires required over the next five years.

Figure 1.3. Staffing Requirements



A = Need (model-based)
B = Actual employees On Board (End of Prior FY)
C = Projected attrition (model-based)
D = New hire need/target

In addition to the modeling framework, the FAA assesses additional factors that could impact the hiring target, such as changes to how the mission is performed that could impact overall staffing levels, changes to the organizational structure that could impact overall staffing levels, and training constraints that could affect estimated training times and overall staffing levels.

Staffing Model

To determine the ATSS workload in the SSCs, the Technical Operations Staffing Model (TSM) is used to calculate direct and indirect labor. Direct labor is time spent completing preventative, corrective, and modification maintenance tasks. Indirect labor is a ratio of direct labor that combines all other duties, such as travel, leave, and training. Indirect labor is derived using historical data.

Direct labor is calculated using a rate-and-volume approach. The equipment rate baseline is defined as the time required to maintain a specific configuration of equipment (facility type, facility code, and facility class) when a CPT is present at the equipment. The TSM then applies the equipment rate baseline to the equipment's location in the NAS. This volume is determined by using the Facility, Service, and Equipment Profile database to identify the number of individual pieces (systems) in those locations.

Once the direct labor has been calculated for each piece of equipment, it is summarized at the SSC level. The SSC direct labor total is multiplied by an indirect labor factor to yield the total equipment labor at the SSC level. This total is then divided by 2,080 hours to estimate the number of CPTs needed to maintain the equipment at the SSC.

At certain SSCs with specific response requirements, the FAA requires a CPT to be present during specified hours to ensure safety and enhanced response times. This is called the watch coverage requirement. When the TSM value does not provide sufficient staffing levels during these hours, the model adjusts to ensure a minimum level of watch coverage.

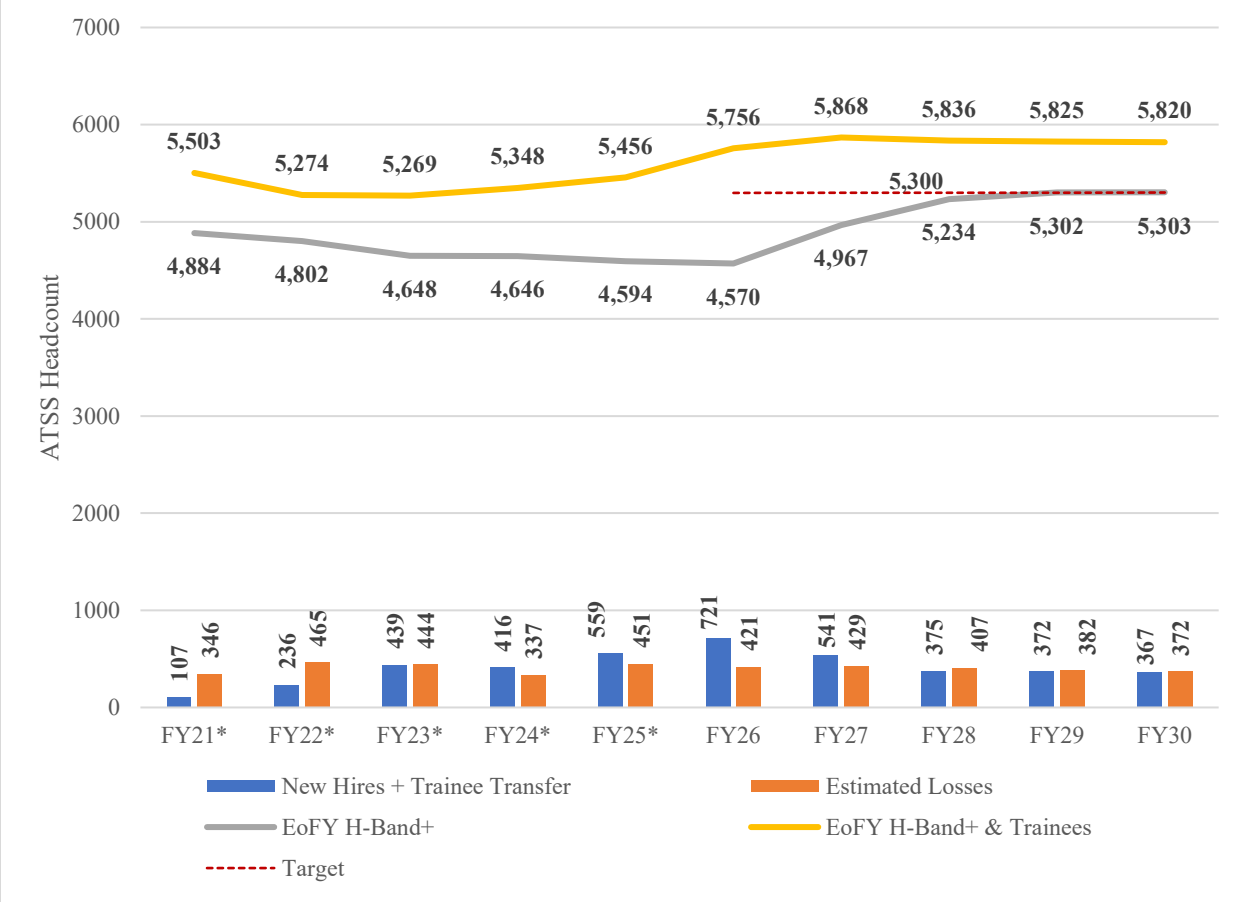
The TSM utilizes a future equipment database to forecast equipment changes over the next five years. The workforce model determines the required staffing levels, assuming the same level of effort is needed to support current equipment. The growth or contraction of the current equipment inventory adjusts the total output. The model results are reviewed and, if necessary, adjusted based on subject matter expertise to account for new efforts, such as the implementation

of new or updated equipment. In addition, equipment can be taken out of service. When this happens, the model estimates the workload required to take the equipment out of service until it is fully decommissioned, and then it is removed from the model. The FAA has additional ATSS positions, including supervisors and other technicians who support inspections and provide technical support to the facilities. These positions are determined using ratios and historical data.

ATSS Staffing Forecast

Figure 1.4 provides the hiring plan for the next several years, taking into consideration forecasted attrition and developmental ATSS hiring needs. It shows the expected end-of-year total headcount (yellow line), CPT headcount (gray line), CPT target (dotted red line), and new hires and losses (blue and orange bars) by year through FY 2030. New ATSSs are typically hired 2-3 years in advance of expected attrition to allow for sufficient training time. The total expected end-of-year headcount number shown in Figure 1.4 reflects this projected advanced hiring. With the planned hiring for FY 2026–FY 2030, the CPT target of 5,300 is projected to be reached in FY 2029.

Figure 1.4. ATSS FY 2021 - FY 2025 Actuals & FY 2026 - FY 2030 Forecast



Figures for FY 2021 to FY 2025 represent actual end-of-year headcount, losses, and hires. Losses include retirements, transfers to non-ATSS positions, resignations, removals, deaths, and developmental attrition. As the forecast for all losses is adjusted and actual training success rates are reported, these numbers will be adjusted to ensure the CPT target is met and maintained at levels necessary to ensure safe and efficient NAS operations.

CHAPTER 2: LOSSES

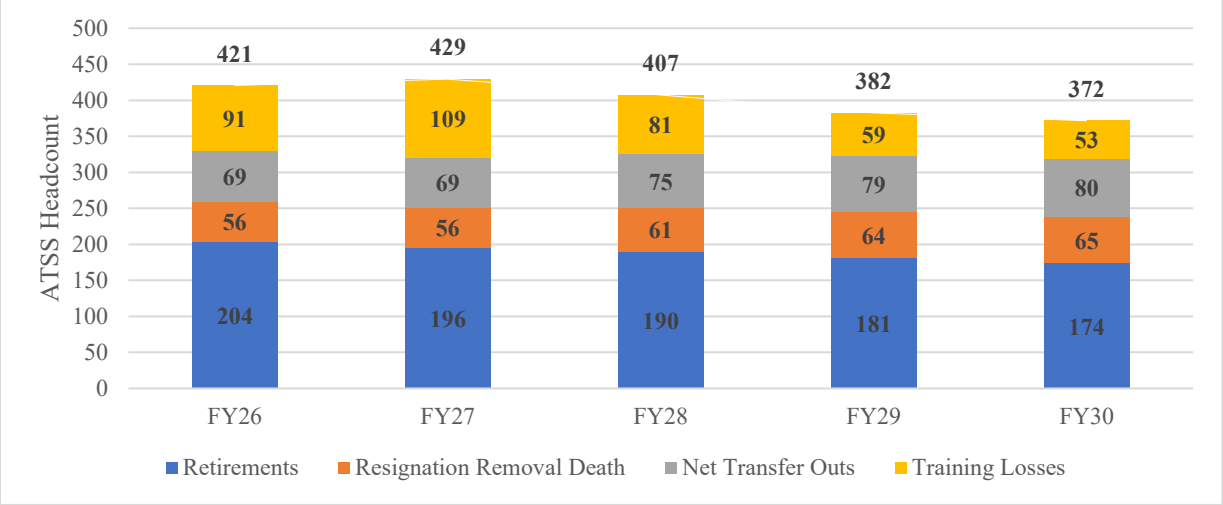
In total, the FAA expects to lose nearly 421 ATSSs due to retirements, promotions, and other losses during FY 2026. Other losses include transfers, resignations, removals, deaths, and developmental attrition. To mitigate the impact of these losses, the FAA hires and staffs facilities so that developmental ATSSs, once fully certified, are prepared to take over responsibilities when senior CPTs leave. Due to the loss of an ATSS's highly specialized skill set upon their departure, it is vital to determine which discipline, what location, and when the organization will be impacted. The FAA will continue to monitor losses and movements and modify hiring plans accordingly.

ATSS Loss Summary

Figure 2.1 shows, by category, the total estimated number of ATSSs that will be lost over the five years, FY 2026 through FY 2030. Losses shown are to the ATSS workforce; these numbers do not include internal transfer of ATSSs between facilities, which can significantly impact individual facility staffing levels. No ATSSs were terminated as probationary employees, and ATSSs were not eligible for the Deferred Resignation Program.

The FAA projects a total loss of approximately 2,000 ATSSs over the next five years. Should losses outpace projections for FY 2026, the FAA will hire additional ATSSs as needed to ensure sufficient ATSSs are available in the future. Ongoing hiring and staffing are monitored, and the hiring and training plans are adjusted accordingly.

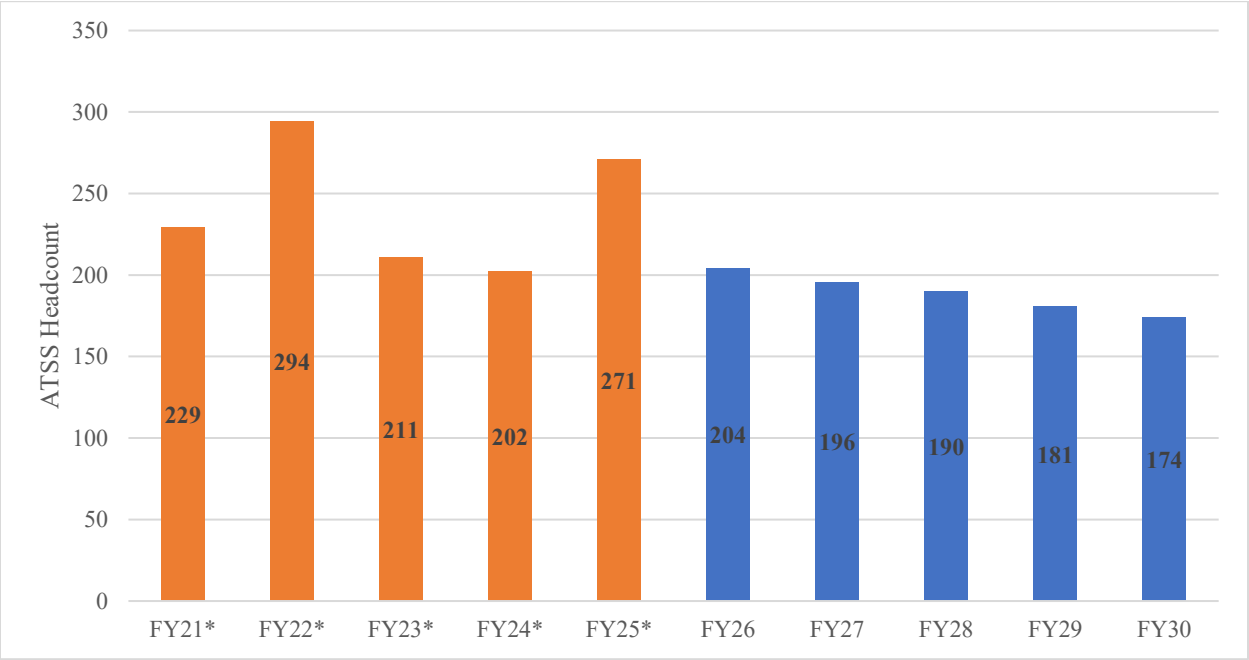
Figure 2.1. ATSS Forecasted Attrition



ATSS Retirements

Retirement data from the last three years (FY 2023 through FY 2025) is used to calculate future retirement projections. Forecasted retirements are derived by analyzing both the eligibility criteria of the workforce and the historical pattern of retirement behavior relative to eligibility. The FAA will continue to monitor both internal factors (e.g., incentive opportunities) and external factors (e.g., legislative changes) that could impact individual retirement decisions. In the last five years, 1,207 ATSSs retired. Over the next five years, ATSS retirements are forecasted at 945. Figure 2.2 displays actual ATSS retirements for FY 2021–FY 2025 and projected ATSS retirements in FY 2026–FY 2030.

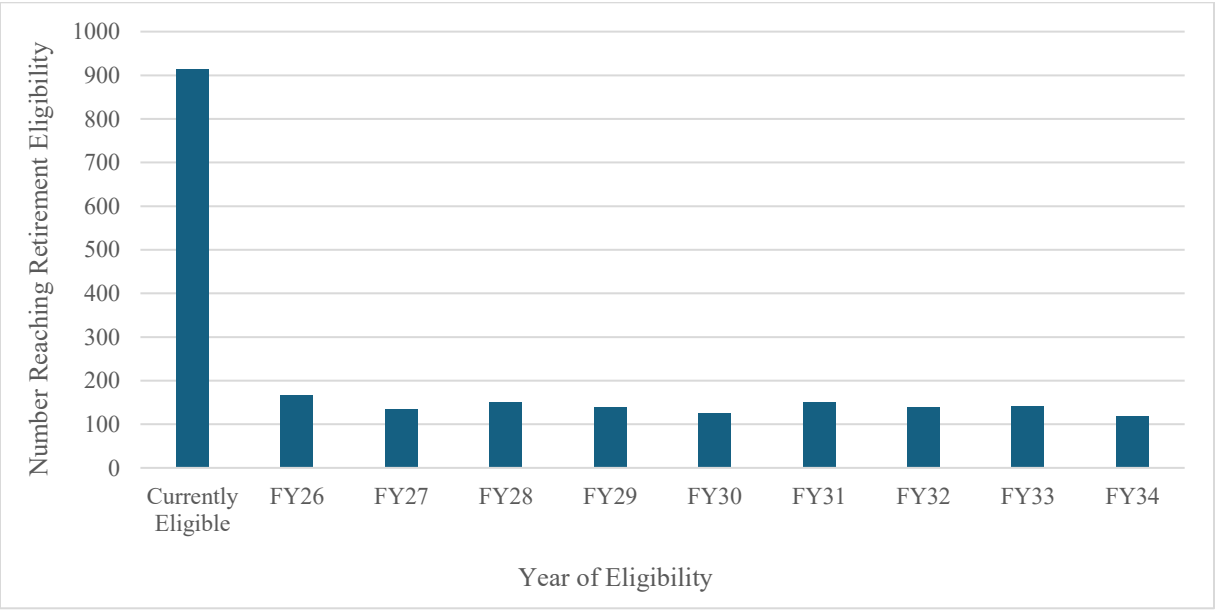
Figure 2.2. ATSS Retirements



ATSS Retirement Eligibility

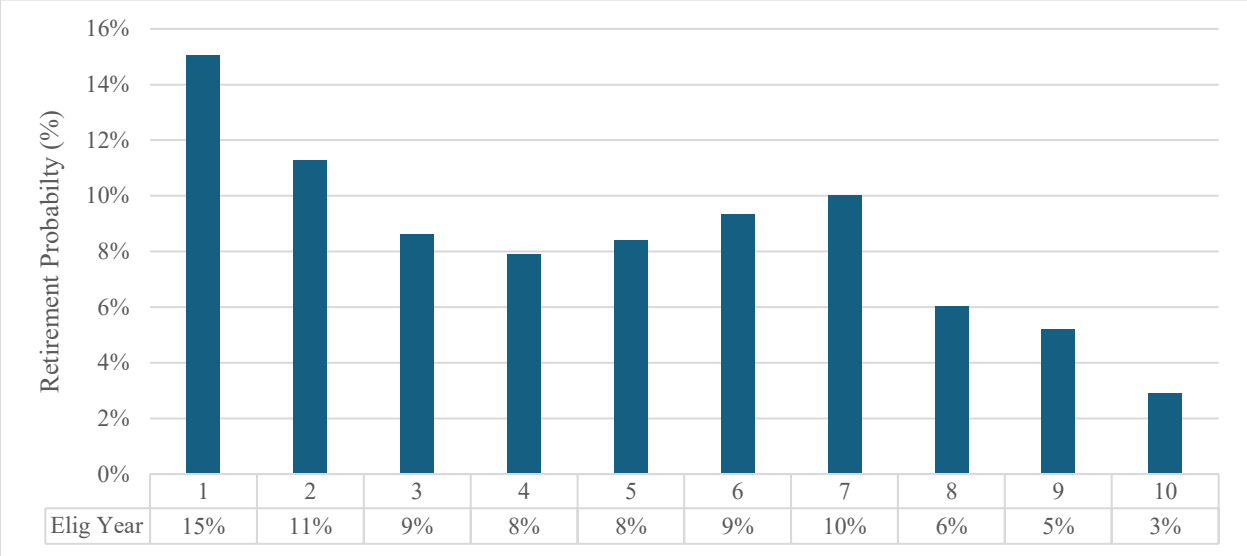
Figure 2.3 shows the number of ATSSs who were retirement eligible as of the end of FY 2025, and those projected to become retirement eligible each fiscal year for the next 10 fiscal years. FAA projections show that an additional 166 ATSSs will become eligible to retire in FY 2026. Approximately 20 percent of the ATSS workforce were eligible to retire at the end of FY 2025, and approximately 15 percent of those eligible are expected to retire in FY 2026. Of the 393 total SSCs, 89 have 3 or more ATSSs eligible to retire. Therefore, the FAA must be prepared for the risk of severe staffing shortfalls in locations with high retirement eligibility.

Figure 2.3. ATSS Retirement Eligibility



Recent data shows that 15 percent of ATSSs retire in their first year of eligibility. Figure 2.4 below shows that an ATSS has a probability of over 50 percent retiring within the first five years of eligibility.

Figure 2.4. ATSS Retirement Behavior



The intent of advanced hiring is to ensure that sufficient new hires are ready to replace ATSSs currently eligible to retire when they actually retire. The FAA strives to minimize retirement, hiring, and training spikes by examining trends and proactively planning years in advance of expected activity.

Other ATSS Losses

Other reasons for ATSS attrition include developmental losses, ATSS transfers to non-ATSS positions, and losses due to resignations, removals (excluding developmental attrition), and deaths, as noted in Table 2.1. Developmental attrition occurs when a trainee leaves the ATSS workforce or separates from the FAA. Historically, ATSS developmental attrition has averaged 15 percent; this percentage is used to predict future developmental attrition. Increased hiring in FY 2026 and FY 2027 drives developmental ATSS attrition increases through FY 2028. The last portion of ATSS attrition includes Resignations, Removals, and Deaths, and ATSS losses due to transfers. Historical ratios are used to calculate these levels.

Table 2.1. Other ATSS Attrition

Fiscal Year	2025 Actual	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	Total
Developmental ATSS Losses	46	91	109	81	59	83	469
ATSS Losses Due to Transfers	75	69	69	75	79	80	447
Resignation Removal Death	59	56	56	61	64	65	361
Total	180	216	234	217	202	228	1,277

CHAPTER 3: HIRING

The FAA safely operates and maintains the NAS through the combined expertise of its people, the support of technology, and the application of standardized procedures. Each day, tens of thousands of aircraft are guided safely and expeditiously through the NAS to their destinations. Deployment of a well-trained and well-staffed ATSS workforce is essential to fulfilling this responsibility. The FAA's goal is to hire new developmental ATSSs in advance of its staffing needs to ensure sufficient training time and to offset future attrition. The FAA will attract and recruit enough applicants to achieve this hiring plan.

Hiring Process

The ATSS hiring plan identifies the number of hiring opportunities for each year based on the forecasted need. These hiring opportunities are then split into cycles, allowing the FAA to provide planning time for all hiring avenues and to adjust for any critical hiring needs throughout the year.

ATSS Hiring Sources

The FAA uses a variety of hiring sources to maximize the pool of applicants for ATSS new-hire positions. The hiring sources used vary depending on each SSC's needs.

Six separate job announcements are posted during each announcement cycle, including entry level positions by discipline (Automation/Communication/Environmental/Navigational Aids/Radar). Each job announcement has a specific set of job locations with an identified hiring need.

Direct hire authorities are used to hire ATSSs on the spot. The timeline to hire is typically shorter using one of these methods, helping alleviate any strain on security, onboarding, and training by bringing new hires on more steadily throughout the year. The FAA typically utilizes the On-the-Spot hiring authority for locations with critical needs and the Veterans Recruitment Appointment for the direct hire of veterans.

Recruitment

The FAA continues to attract and recruit high-quality applicants into the ATSS workforce to meet staffing requirements by leveraging social media, virtual information sessions, and targeted broadcasts, while continuing to build a network with technical schools and industry. These practices allow the organization to attract and hire qualified applicants with the necessary skill sets, meeting future needs to create a workforce with the technical, functional, and leadership capabilities needed to accomplish the FAA mission.

In addition, veterans are a valuable resource of in-demand work experience. The FAA participates in veteran-specific career fairs and attends on-base military transition events. Expanded use of social media helps the organization reach veteran and military talent. More than 9,300 applicants responded to the vacancy announcements and public notice in FY 2025 (see Figure 1.4 for ATSS Personnel hiring actuals, including FY 2025). In FY 2026, the FAA will continue recruiting and hiring ATSSs to meet staffing requirements.

CONCLUSION

The FAA FY 2026 ATSS Workforce Plan is the first published ATSS staffing document. The plan expands hiring, accelerates training, and strengthens the ATSS pipeline to meet the demands of a modern and evolving NAS and the deployment of the BNATCS. In addition, the plan leverages strategic investments in people, training infrastructure, and process improvements. The ATSS Workforce Plan will be monitored and evaluated to incorporate updates in the future. By advancing hiring and training in parallel with efforts to retain experienced CPTs, sustain legacy equipment, and deploy new equipment across the NAS, the FAA will maintain a safe and efficient NAS for years to come.


U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
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