



**FORECASTS OF IFR AIRCRAFT
HANDLED BY FAA AIR ROUTE
TRAFFIC CONTROL CENTERS
FY 2022-2045**

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. While the forecasts consider the effects from the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19), they do not reflect the more recent economic and political shocks such as rising inflation, higher interest rates, the Ukraine/Russia conflict, and other implications such as rising energy prices.

In FY2021, traffic at the 24 ARTCCs increased 6 percent, a modest recovery from the 27 percent decline in FY2020 due to COVID-19. The 6 percent increase in FY2021 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 FY2021. General aviation traffic experienced a much larger recovery, about a 20 percent increase in traffic in FY2021.

Similar to last year's ARTCC forecasts, this year's forecasts incorporate the effect of COVID-19 and 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 faster than the FY2025 recovery timeline predicted last year. The shorter 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. 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 is predicted to experience a faster recovery than commercial traffic. In FY2021, general aviation aircraft handled was already at 97 percent of the FY2019 level when combining traffic from all 24 ARTCCs. Due to the relatively slower recovery speed of commercial traffic, the share of general aviation aircraft handled at all 24 ARTCCs is increasing, from 14 percent in FY2019 to 18 percent in FY2021. General aviation traffic is expected to reach FY2019 levels by FY2022, which is one year faster than the FY2023 recovery timeline predicted for commercial traffic.

During the 24-year forecast period, the number of aircraft handled is forecast to increase 2.5 percent annually, from 37.5 million aircraft handled in 2022 to 66.5 million in 2045. The largest increase occurs in the commercial aircraft handled category. This category of aircraft is forecast to increase from 29.6 million aircraft handled in 2022 to 57.4 million in 2045 at an average annual growth rate of approximately 2.9 percent. General aviation aircraft handled are forecast to increase at a rate of 0.8 percent annually, totaling 7.7 million aircraft handled in 2045. Military aircraft handled are forecast to hold steady at 2021 levels and total 1.4 million in 2045.

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 23 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 2021 and forecasts for FY 2022 through FY 2045.