

GPS Air Traffic System

Ted Shaffrey:

A plane passes within eyesight of another aircraft above Atlantic City, New Jersey. It shows up on the cockpit radar, but it also appears on an onboard GPS device. The FAA wants to put these in the cockpits of all planes.

Michael Huerta:

It really is a revolution in air transportation.

Ted Shaffrey:

Seventy-five years ago this week, the federal government started tracking air traffic, and they say this is the future.

Michael Huerta:

The decisions we're making in the next couple of years really will set the foundation for the next seventy-five years.

Ted Shaffrey:

The GPS device in your car is not reliable enough for air travel, but government engineers say this new souped-up version for planes is better than ground radar.

Michael McNeil:

We actually have a-a GPS that's accurate down to within, like, two or three feet, um, of where the actual airplane is.

Ted Shaffrey:

Ground radar has been the primary method of air navigation since World War II.

Wilson Felder:

We make airplanes fly very precise routes from one ground-based navigational aid to the other, in a zig-zag pattern across the United States, and we want to make that a smooth line.

Ted Shaffrey:

The new GPS systems are being touted as the solution to a host of problems caused by the rapid growth of air travel.

FAA promotional video:

...will allow aircraft to fly more precise approach and landing patterns, meaning that runways can be safely positioned in close proximity to expand capacity but not airport boundaries.

Ted Shaffrey:

Through the year 2025, it will cost as much as twenty-two billion dollars from the government and an additional twenty billion from the airline industry. The FAA says the new GPS systems will reduce airline delays by up to thirty-five percent.

FAA promotional video:

...will be able to avoid inclement weather thanks to a common picture, one authoritative source for up-to-the-minute weather information, available to everyone in the system.

Ted Shaffrey:

The GPS plane program is funded now, but some worry it may fall victim to new austerity measures in Congress, or that private carriers will resist the out-of-pocket costs.

Ted Shaffrey:

In April, the CEO of Delta Airlines said, quote: We want to leverage the technology we have today before we add more technology and more cost.

Ted Shaffrey:

The deputy administrator of the FAA says he hopes they can reach a common ground.

Michael Huerta:

Aviation is a very significant contributor to the economy as a whole.

Ted Shaffrey:

Carriers such as Southwest and Alaska Airlines have already started using the GPS technology.

Ted Shaffrey:

Ted Shaffrey, Associated Press, Atlantic City, New Jersey.

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