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US Federal Updates

Senate Hearing on NTSB Preliminary Report and KDCA Midair Collision

Summary of Facts

On Mar. 27, the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee's Aviation, Space, and Innovation Subcommittee held a hearing on the January midair collision at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (KDCA). The

hearing featured testimony from National Transportation Safety Board Chair Jennifer Homendy, Acting FAA Administrator Chris Rocheleau, and Brig. Gen. Matthew Braman, director of army aviation for the US Army.

During the hearing, the FAA announced immediate safety measures, including the creation of the Safety Risk Management Panel to identify areas where helicopter and fixed-wing aircraft interactions might pose risks. A multidisciplinary FAA task force is conducting a nationwide review of 10 locations covering 21 airports as part of a broader mixed-traffic airspace analysis. Offshore helicopter operations in the Gulf are also under evaluation.

The hearing additionally addressed the surge in air traffic controller hiring. Rocheleau reported that the FAA has received over 10,000 applications and has more than 8,000 candidates currently in testing. The agency reduced its hiring timeline by five months, committed to filling all FAA Academy training seats, and introduced a 30% salary increase to attract new controllers. Additionally, Rocheleau said the FAA is expanding partnerships with universities to strengthen long-term workforce development.

VAI Position and Actions

VAI supports the FAA's efforts to enhance safety in mixed-use airspace and remains committed to advocating for safety improvements across all operating environments. VAI will continue engaging with key stakeholders to ensure collaboration on these critical issues.

US State and Local Updates



From left to right: Panel moderator Katia Veraza and panelists Kenji Sugahara, Clement Solomon, Robin Grace, Dan Harmon, and Bryan Budds.

VERTICON Holds State Panel on AAM Readiness

Summary of Facts

During VERTICON 2025 in Dallas, Texas, VAI hosted a panel featuring US state aviation directors discussing how states are preparing for advanced air mobility (AAM) integration. The panel provided insights into infrastructure planning, state budgets, and state-level readiness efforts.

The panelists were:

- Kenji Sugahara, Director, Oregon Department of Aviation
- Clement Solomon, Intermodal Director, Georgia Department of Transportation
- Robin Grace, Chief of AAM Integration & Strategy, Massachusetts Department of Transportation Aeronautics Division
- Dan Harmon, Aviation Division Director, Texas Department of Transportation
- Bryan Budds, Director, Michigan Department of Transportation Aeronautics Division.

As AAM technology advances, understanding state-level perspectives and preparations is critical for ensuring a seamless and coordinated transition.

VAI Position and Actions

VAI is committed to supporting state efforts in AAM integration by advocating for policies that ensure safe, efficient, and scalable operations. VAI will continue collaborating with state aviation directors, policymakers, and industry leaders to align infrastructure planning with federal guidelines while addressing state-specific needs. Key priorities include educating communities on AAM benefits and developing a skilled workforce to support this evolving industry.

Utah Passes Bill Promoting AAM

Summary of Facts

Last week, the governor of Utah signed into law [S.B.96](#), Advanced Air Mobility Amendments, sponsored by State Sen. Wayne Harper (R-16), directing the Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) to launch a public education campaign on advanced air mobility (AAM). This campaign will highlight AAM use cases, economic benefits, state initiatives, and implementation strategies. The law takes effect May 7, 2025, and establishes a framework for promoting and integrating AAM in Utah.

Key provisions of S.B.96 include:

- UDOT will educate the public on AAM benefits, economic impact, and industry initiatives, coordinate with industry leaders, and facilitate public demonstrations
- The bill updates Utah's aeronautics laws and defines key AAM terms
- By Jul. 1, 2026, UDOT must develop a publicly available tool kit with model ordinances, best practices, and resources for local AAM policymaking (adoption by local governments is optional).

This legislation supports AAM integration into Utah's transportation system while ensuring public awareness and regulatory clarity.

VAI Position and Actions

VAI applauds the passage of S.B.96 as a significant step toward AAM adoption in Utah. By increasing public awareness, fostering investment, and promoting industry growth, this law strengthens Utah's position as a leader in vertical flight innovation.

Hawaii State Senate Considers S.C.R.180 and S.R.150

Summary of Facts

As the legislative deadlines for introducing bills approach, states often shift their focus to resolutions, which express legislative intent rather than create new laws. **Three weeks ago, the Hawaii State Senate introduced [S.C.R.180](#) and its companion, [S.R.150](#), urging the Hawaii Department of Transportation (HDOT) to increase data collection from general aviation and commercial helicopter tour operators.**

Both resolutions request that HDOT submit an annual report summarizing specific safety-related information for each tour operator in the state, post the report publicly on the HDOT website, and adopt rules requiring the public posting of the information at every location of each operator. The Senate Transportation Committee plans to make a decision on these resolutions this week.

As key requirements of S.C.R.180 and S.C.150, HDOT must compile and publish:

- **Ownership Details.** Names of individuals/entities with 20% or higher ownership in each tour company and the names of any other aviation companies owned by the individual/entity in the past 10 years.
- **Liability Insurance.** Amount and type of coverage for each operator.
- **Pilot Training Requirements.** Minimum required training hours for pilots.
- **Safety Program Participation.** Whether the operator is part of recognized safety programs.
- **Aircraft Safety Features.** Disclosure of flotation devices, ADS-B technology, crash-resistant fuel tanks, and any other safety measures identified by HDOT.

VAI Position and Actions

VAI supports aviation safety but has serious concerns about these resolutions because they conflict with federal law, which gives the federal government sole oversight authority over aviation. Federal law always takes precedence over state-level mandates, a concept known as federal preemption. Under federal law, the FAA has exclusive jurisdiction over aviation safety and operational regulations and is the sole entity responsible for overseeing aviation safety and operational disclosures.

In written testimony before the Senate Transportation Committee, VAI urged lawmakers to recognize federal preemption and oppose these resolutions. We remain committed to working with the Hawaii State Legislature to explore solutions that enhance safety while aligning with FAA regulations.

News from VAI's Western US Regional Representative

“Word from the Street,” by Chuck Street, VAI Western US Regional Representative

Summary of Facts

March was an exciting month, with VERTICON 2025 in Dallas as the standout event. We coordinated the movement of over 40 vertical aircraft into the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center Dallas, where 686 industry exhibitors showcased their innovations. The energy throughout the show was incredible!

Two moments at VERTICON were particularly exciting:

- Robinson Helicopter unveiled its **new R88 helicopter**. The reveal generated significant buzz, with FAA certification expected before the end of the decade.
- I had the privilege of interviewing 10 of **VAI's Salute to Excellence awardees** before attendees inside the exhibit hall. These individuals are truly exceptional, and their achievements highlight the talent and dedication within our industry. It was an honor to share their stories.

Looking ahead, on Saturday, Apr. 5, VAI and the Vertical Flight Society are cosponsoring the “Advancing Rotorcraft Firefighting: Operational Lessons and Innovation Summit.” Hosted by Robinson Helicopter Company in Torrance, California, this event will bring together key stakeholders from aerial firefighting agencies and technical communities to discuss current strategies and the future of rotary and vertical lift aircraft in emergency response.

Join us!

When: Apr. 5, 2025, 10:00 am – 2:00 pm Pacific

Where: Robinson Helicopter Company's Safety Course Hangar, 2931 Airport Dr., Torrance, CA 90505

Cost: \$20/person; includes lunch and refreshments

**Register today
for the event**

This summit is another great example of VAI's commitment to powering up the future of vertical aviation!

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