



AIRPORT BUSINESS

Airports, Engineers and the FAA: A New Way Forward

With record FAA funding now locked in through 2028, airports have a rare opportunity to modernize—but only if industry and regulators can close the growing gap between legislation and execution, a challenge the Airport Consultants Council is tackling through a new, collaborative model with the FAA.

Bryan Hafertepe, T.J. Schulz, Peter Kirsch, Ally Fields

Jan. 25, 2026

5 min read

Five things you'll learn

- Why FAA reauthorization success now hinges on implementation, not funding—and where projects are most at risk of delay.
- How the Airport Consultants Council's Reauthorization Task Force is reshaping FAA–industry coordination beyond traditional advocacy.
- What new Reauthorization Program Guidance Letters (R-PGLs) mean in practice for AIP grants, NEPA reviews and civil-rights compliance.
- How regional inconsistencies inside the FAA affect airport timelines—and how they're being identified and resolved.
- Why institutional knowledge loss at the FAA is changing the role of consultants and engineers in keeping projects moving.

When Congress passed the [FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024](#), it delivered five years of record infrastructure funding through 2028. Airports now have predictable capital to plan long-term, modernize aging systems and build for future demand. But across the country, airports are adjusting to new statutory requirements while the FAA's Office of Airports faces retirements, staffing shortages and a widening portfolio of responsibilities. The gap between legislative intent and on-the-ground execution could impact projects, create inconsistencies across regional offices and strain already thin timelines.



Bryan Hafertepe

An industry-led effort is working to change that trajectory.

The [Airport Consultants Council](#) (ACC) Reauthorization Task Force, formed before the reauthorization bill passed, has emerged as a model for how public and private expertise can work in lockstep to translate policy into progress. The group has spent the past year identifying urgent implementation needs, flagging inconsistencies and collaborating directly with FAA policymakers to smooth the path from law to runway.

FAA Reauthorization

What is the biggest obstacle to turning FAA reauthorization funding into on-time airport projects?

- ☐ Inconsistent FAA regional interpretations
- ☐ Staffing shortages and retirements at the FAA
- ☐ Unclear or evolving guidance documents
- ☐ Airport capacity and local approval constraints

Finish

"Airports have the funding and vision to grow, but progress only happens when everyone – from the engineers on the ground to the policymakers in Washington – works from the same playbook," said Bryan Hafertepe, associate principal and COO of Connico and an ACC committee member.

Turning legislation into real-time coordination

ACC created the task force in anticipation of reauthorization, aiming to unify member input and articulate industry-wide priorities. When the bill passed, instead of disbanding, the group shifted immediately to implementation.

"A number of our recommendations were incorporated into the bill," said T.J. Schulz, ACC president. "But where this group really stands out is what happened next. We stayed engaged to make sure those reforms reached the airports they were designed to help."

Rather than operate as a traditional advocacy arm, the task force adopted a two-way model: identify the provisions likely to cause early confusion, provide operational guidance and work directly with the FAA to resolve issues before they delay construction seasons.

"We told the FAA, 'Here are the provisions that matter most right now, and here's how to implement them efficiently.' That was a novel approach," said Peter Kirsch, partner at Kaplan Kirsch.

The result has been a streamlined feedback loop that offers federal policymakers a direct line to on-the-ground realities and offers airports more timely clarification than in past reauthorization cycles.

Translating policy into progress

The FAA has issued a new slate of Reauthorization Program Guidance Letters (R-PGLs), designed to clarify Airport Improvement Program funding, environmental requirements and civil-rights provisions.

The task force's partnership with the FAA has already produced tangible shifts in how the agency rolls out new requirements. The task force has provided early input on updates to the AIP Handbook and NEPA processes, aiming to reduce delays caused by overly broad or inconsistent interpretation. At the same time, the group has helped identify and resolve divergent interpretations across FAA regional offices – a longstanding frustration for airports.

"We can identify when one region interprets a rule differently than another," Schulz said. "And we are working collaboratively with the FAA to resolve it."

Taken together, these efforts aim to help airports overcome administrative uncertainty and move projects forward despite internal agency transitions.

Filling critical institutional knowledge gaps

As the FAA experiences generational turnover, the loss of decades of institutional knowledge could reshape how quickly the agency can respond to inquiries, process grants and issue clarifications. Industry experts, many of whom previously served within the FAA, are helping fill that gap.

"When experts leave or retire from federal service, they remain passionate about the FAA and improving the aviation system. As these professionals have joined ACC member firms, we've been eager to engage them to help strengthen the

system from outside," said Ally Fields, Crawford, Murphy & Tilly's government affairs lead and chair of ACC's Advocacy Committee.

Kirsch agrees: "In many respects, ACC members are the best substitute for the agency's living memory. We remember what worked, what didn't and why."

This continuity has supported FAA personnel as they navigate complex statutory changes while ensuring airports, consultants and engineers get consistent answers that align with past precedent and current law.

"Every improvement in how these programs are implemented affects the traveler. The smoother the process, the sooner airports can modernize and better serve their communities," Hafertepe said.

Building a permanent model for federal-industry collaboration

Recognizing the ongoing need for structured coordination, the task force is transitioning into a permanent ACC Policy Committee. Its purpose is to maintain continuous dialogue with FAA leadership, ensure consistent interpretation of federal guidance and help translate future legislative mandates into clear, actionable processes.

"We're proving that sustained dialogue, engagement and collaboration, not one-off advocacy, is how real change happens," Schulz said.

Beyond aviation, this structure could serve as a template for other federal agencies managing multiyear infrastructure programs. The model combines real-world expertise with policymaking to reduce delays and improve the return on federal investment.

"This isn't about influence; it's about alignment," Hafertepe said. "When we align expertise with public priorities, everyone wins – the agency, the airports and the traveling public."

About the Author



Bryan Hafertepe

COO AND PROJECT SPECIALIST

Bryan Hafertepe, PE, COO and Project Specialist, is a licensed professional engineer focused on cost...

[Show more](#)

T.J. Schulz

T.J. Schulz is president of the [Airport Consultants Council \(ACC\)](#), representing more than 200 member firms advancing airport...

Peter Kirsch

Ally Fields

Ally Fields leads government affairs for [Crawford, Murphy & Tilly](#) and chairs the Airport Consultants Council's (ACC) Advocacy Committee,...

Source URL: <https://www.aviationpros.com/airport-business/article/55343574/airports-engineers-and-the-faa-a-new-way-forward>