

5/13/2026

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

2026-167/7-4

To: FAA (ATM ZTL ARTCC)

2350819

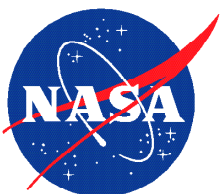
Info: FAA (AVP-1, AVP-200, AFS-260, AFS-200, Director of Air Traffic Operations, ESA South), A4A, ALPA, AOPA, APA, ASAP, ATSAP, ATSG, CAPA, IATA, ICAO, ICASS, IFALPA, IPA, NATCA, NBAA, NTSB, RAA, SWAPA

From: Becky L. Hooey, Director
NASA Aviation Safety Reporting System

Re: ZTL Operational Concerns

We recently received ASRS reports describing a safety concern that may involve your area of operational responsibility. We do not have sufficient details to assess either the factual accuracy or possible gravity of the report. It is our policy to relay the reported information to the appropriate authority for evaluation and any necessary follow-up. We feel you should be aware of the enclosed deidentified report.

To properly assess the usefulness of our alert message service, we would appreciate it if you would take the time to give us your feedback on the value of the information that we have provided. Please contact Dr. Becky Hooey at (408) 541-2854 or email at becky.l.hooey@nasa.gov.



Aviation Safety Reporting System
P.O. Box 189 | Moffett Field, CA | 94035-0189



ACN 2350819**DATE / TIME**

Date of Occurrence	202604
Local Time Of Day	1801 to 2400

PLACE

Locale	ZTL.ARTCC
State	GA
Altitude - MSL	24000

AIRCRAFT / EQUIPMENT X

ATC / Advisory - Center	ZTL
Make Model Name	Medium Transport, Low Wing, 2 Turbojet Eng

PERSON 1

Function - Air Traffic Control	Enroute
ASRS Report Number	2350819

EVENTS

Anomaly	ATC Issue - All Types
Anomaly	Deviation / Discrepancy - Procedural - Published Material / Policy
Anomaly	No Specific Anomaly Occurred - Unwanted Situation
Detector - Person	Air Traffic Control
Result - Air Traffic Control	Separated Traffic

NARRATIVE 1

Yet again I have to write a report because the safety culture of management, Traffic Management Unit (TMU), and the command center is severely lacking. The FAA does not have safety as its number one priority. They care more about efficiency and running plans to keep stakeholders happy than controller workload and safe sector flow.

On Day 0 multiple areas in ZTL worked extremely high volume traffic that was not predicted or well managed due to the special event. I had already been working steady traffic flow at Spartanburg with CLT departures and arrivals, and ATL departures as well as numerous point outs on AGS/AIK/DNL/HQU arrivals going into East Departure. I was called by the Macon sector to say that East 16 had told them to hold AGS and I would need to hold one in my airspace, once I got them in the hold I called East to let them know ATL departures would be delayed climbing due to the holding pattern, East said "we're not holding AGS put them on a 180" which I did. Not two minutes later Macon called again to say we are holding AIK, put another in the hold and then the supervisor said were running AIK but 25 Miles in Trail (MIT). I called East and they said that they had never been holding AIK. This was just the start of an extremely chaotic and unsafe 45 minutes where it became clear that TMU and OMs were not aware of the traffic volume and did not have a plan to appropriately mitigate it. The sector Spartanburg has a Monitor Alert Parameter (MAP) value of 14, we started at a 20 and briefly went up to a 24 which is absolutely not safe, an unacceptable risk for no reason.

When I finished up with the holding mess I looked back to the east side to see about 8 AGS area departures flashing at me all looking for higher and with a mess over overtakes and bad speeds. All of these departures would cross the standard ATL departures with everyone wanting higher. I had to vector a few to maintain

separation but this was an absolute disaster where my D-side and me were barely holding on to the sector. I left that session feeling extremely stressed and frustrated that we did not get support from TMU and ZTL management to stop sectors from being overloaded.

This happened because the command center, facility management, and TMU do not care about safety and do not care about sector overload. Their number one priority seems to be keeping as many aircraft moving as possible, especially when it involves special events. TMU is forcing normal ATL and CLT traffic flows which already put our sectors near capacity and then adding significant event volume on top of that, is not a safe combination.

Additionally we do not have the staffing to support overloaded sectors with D-sides and trackers. We had XX people on this shift and needed two more than that positions open but we couldn't do it.

Recommendation: When there are special events regular traffic flow must be reduced to not overload sectors, even something like 30 MIT off ATL and CLT would have helped in this case. It is unsafe for a controller to work normal traffic flow plus 100s of additional flights for the special events.

From what I can discern TMU has no tools to plan for departures pushes off of smaller airports, especially with a special event they need to be able to see these departures and meter them to manage sector overload. When a sector starts getting overloaded the first move should be shut off departures, re-evaluate the situation and then resume with needed restrictions in place, this did not happen in this event.

Local facilities need more say on what restrictions to implement from the command center, especially when it involves safety. I can't count how many times I have told an Operations Supervisor (OS) or OM that some situation is unsafe but the answer is that's what the command center wants so we have to do it.

Traffic volume needs to match controller staffing, we need to reduce traffic on low staffed days and this needs to be variable depending on numbers. If we have 9/12 then we should have 75% of traffic volume, this way demand can better meet capacity as opposed to the current method of we will put in a staffing trigger if you are at 50%.

"No notice holding" needs to be an absolute last resort, we should have the tools to see when too many aircraft will get to an airport at the same time and manage that well in advance to reduce last minute holding and vectors which increase risk.

The MAP is a useful tool but it is too slow to update and does not properly capture departures from small airports. Today 32 Spartanburg was showing green for most of the day with the exception of the current block that was a red +5 – 10 above MAP. How can we use this tool to manage sectors if it can't accurately look at departures?

Overall I cannot wrap my head around the fact that on a normal day if we are 1 over the MAP number on a combined sector they will split it, if a sector appears red on the board they will add a D-side but on a day like today where we exceeded the MAP values on multiple sectors we are just a “little busy” and managers say “well we made it through, thanks for the hard work” this is UNACCEPTABLE we cannot have it both ways. If exceeding MAP values is a big deal on a normal day then it also needs to be a big deal on special events and weather days. We cannot keep working sectors that are too overloaded to safely separate traffic, someday there will be an error that is unrecoverable.

SYNOPSIS

ZTL Center Controller reported being overloaded during a special event with an extremely high volume of traffic that was not predicted or well managed.