FAA tees up $875M AI tool to help manage air traffic congestion

An AI tool is set to start advising air traffic controllers on managing air traffic in the congested airspace above the Washington, DC, area. The expected launch would be the first step toward a planned nationwide rollout covering the 29 million square miles of US national airspace overseen by the Federal Aviation Administration.

The FAA describes the SMART system as using AI models to predict air traffic flows and identify potential conflicts based on operational factors like airline schedules, weather, airport capacity, and airspace conditions. US government and industry officials told The Wall Street Journal that SMART could debut for the three major airports in the Washington, DC, area as soon as Monday, September 21.

The decision to launch SMART in a limited scope before going nationwide is the “right call,” said Philip Mann, principal consultant at Vector Strategic Consulting LLC, where he advises on aviation safety and AI governance. Mann previously worked at the FAA in multiple roles for 17 years.

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