March 1987

AVIATION INFORMATION

Movement of Personnel and Data Bases

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B-226541

March 27, 1987

The Honorable Paul S. Sarbanes
The Honorable John W. Warner
United States Senate

This responds to your October 21, 1986, request and
subsequent discussions with your offices concerning the
transfer of staff and data bases within the Research and
Special Programs Administration (RSPA), Department of
Transportation (DOT). After briefing your staff on February
18, we agreed to provide a fact sheet.

RSPA plans to transfer the functions and personnel from its
Office of Aviation Information Management (OAIM) in
Washington, D.C., to another RSPA unit, the Transportation
Systems Center (TSC) in Cambridge, Massachusetts, to increase
the efficiency of its operation. The 28 data bases affected
by the transfer contain financial and operations data on the
U.S. aviation industry. The 21 personnel who work with these
data bases are subject to reassignment.

We obtained information on (1) the status of transition
planning, (2) the needs of users, (3) the operating cost in
Washington and Cambridge, and (4) the applicability of Office
of Management and Budget Circular (OMB) A-76. We reviewed
documents and interviewed officials in the DOT Office of the
Secretary, RSPA, TSC, and the OAIM. We also obtained
information from nongovernmental users of the data bases. We
did not perform a benefit-cost analysis of the proposed
transfer.

In summary, RSPA has not yet completed its transition
planning. RSPA has given its commitment to meeting user
concerns but has no specific plans for this. It has
personnel cost estimates for the operation in Washington and
Cambridge but has not yet estimated other costs involved in
the transfer. The requirements of Circular A-76 do not
apply, according to OMB, because RSPA plans to use contractor
staff only for positions already vacated by Washington staff.

STATUS OF TRANSITION PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

RSPA has not yet completed its transition planning but began to implement staff reassignments in November 1986. In December, RSPA gave notice to seven staff that they would be reassigned in February and March. RSPA has given similar notice to three additional staff, whose position reassignments are scheduled for May and will reassign eight more by September. Three of the original 21 positions will remain in Washington.

RSPA anticipates that most of the staff in the 18 positions scheduled for reassignment will leave their positions rather than move to Cambridge. DOT has provided outplacement support for staff wishing to stay in Washington. Seven positions have already been vacated by staff who have retired or taken other jobs. The functions of persons not moving to Cambridge will be performed by other civil service staff or contract personnel at TSC in Cambridge.

RSPA has not completed its transition plan for the 28 RSPA data bases that are now maintained at the DOT's computer center in Washington. The data bases are classified by RSPA into two categories: multi-user and single-user data bases.

In order to decide which of the multi-user data bases to transfer to Cambridge, RSPA must complete a series of basic technical analyses for each of the data bases. Another option RSPA is considering is to contract the operation of some of the data bases to private firms--an arrangement now employed for one large data base. RSPA expects the analyses to be complete in July and to make its final decisions at that time.

RSPA plans to transfer responsibility for the cost and management of its single-user data bases to the user organizations--largely policy units--elsewhere in DOT. Most are relatively small data bases, which draw on selected data from the large, multi-user data bases for special DOT policy and program applications.

USER NEEDS

The needs of both government and private users center on ensuring continuity of the current levels of data accuracy, timeliness, consistency, and adequacy of technical support. Specifically, users expressed concern that data quality may deteriorate as a result of the loss of experienced staff and

2

the use of untested data flow procedures used to transfer documents and transmit data between Washington, Cambridge, and a contractor in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

RSPA management has given its commitment to taking the action needed to ensure continuity of services. For example, RSPA will reconsider its currently planned staffing levels if more staff are needed to perform functions adequately (see section below).

DOT organizational units that expect to receive responsibility for the cost and management of single-user data bases are not yet in a position to adequately plan for this because RSPA is unable to provide the historical cost data as a basis for budget estimates (see section below) and because RSPA plans to convert some of these single-user data bases to microcomputer operations but has no specific implementation plans.

OPERATING COSTS

RSPA has not conducted a cost-effectiveness analysis of the transfer, in part because DOT's Transportation Computer Center does not have a cost accounting system capable of providing the baseline cost of the operation of these data bases in Washington. However, RSPA is developing some estimates of the cost of the operation in Cambridge.

RSPA estimates annual personnel cost savings of about 9 percent--$70,000--(see p. 7), on the basis of TSC's plan to use only 13 of the 18 positions reassigned to Cambridge, to perform the same functions (see p. 8). However, RSPA's transition plan states:

> "The number of replacement personnel does not indicate a final determination of how many people would actually be required to perform the function. This can only be determined after the transfer has been accomplished and the scope of the activities has been determined."

When RSPA's technical analyses of each of the data base transitions are completed, RSPA will be able to estimate the one-time costs of the transition and the recurrent costs for operating those data bases it decides to move to Cambridge. It will also be better able to help plan the future of the single-user data bases.

APPLICABILITY OF OMB CIRCULAR A-76

OMB Circular A-76 sets forth procedures for determining whether certain activities should be performed under contract with commercial sources or in-house using government facilities and personnel. A-76 requires an agency to perform a cost comparison study before using contractor personnel to perform functions handled by federal civil servants.

At Cambridge, TSC plans to use contract support personnel to perform only the functions of positions vacated by DOT staff who decide not to move from Washington to Cambridge. Under OMB's interpretation of the Circular, the filling of vacant positions is equivalent to a "new start," which does not require a cost comparison study.

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We discussed the contents of this fact sheet with DOT officials. They concurred with our facts and their comments have been incorporated as appropriate. As arranged with your offices, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this fact sheet until 30 days from the date of this letter. At that time we will send copies to interested parties and make copies available to others upon request. If you have any questions on this fact sheet, please call me at (202) 366-1743. Major contributors to this fact sheet are listed in appendix I.

Kenneth M. Mead
Associate Director

SECTION 1

ACCOMPANYING TABLES

TABLE 1

RSPA AVIATION DATA BASES

Multi-User Data Bases

1. Form 41 Financial Schedules System
2. Form 41 Traffic Schedules System
3. International Civil Aviation Organization Reporting System
4. Fuel Cost and Consumption
5. Master Coordinate File Maintenance
6. Form 298-C Commuter Traffic Data Systems
7. Form 217 Charter Data System
8. Flight Schedule System
9. ER-586 and Schedule T-9 Service Segment Data
10. Passenger Origin and Destination Survey
11. Tape Copying Service
12. Aircraft Inventory
13. Reports Control System
14. Carrier Codes
15. Aircraft Type Codes Maintenance

Single-User Data Bases

1. Environmental Airport Analysis
2. Commuter/Air Taxi System
3. International Route Authority System
4. Import-Export Data System
5. Denied Boarding System
6. Employee Protection System
7. War Air Services Program
8. Essential Air Services Program
9. Report on Airline Service
10. International Freight Rate Monitoring System
11. Automation Fare Monitoring System
12. Work Item Tracking System
13. Consumer Complaint System

Source: DOT Transportation Systems Center Aviation Information
          Program Plan for FY 1987 and FY 1988, February 1987.

TABLE 2

COMPARISON OF ESTIMATED COSTS
(excluding the cost of moving and operating the data bases)

Cost category	Estimated cost using all civil service personnel (Positions)	Costs (thousands)	Planned 1988 TSC costs (Positions)	Costs (thousands)	Projected savings by line item (thousands)	(Percent)
LABOR						
Civil service	(21)	$ 780	(6)	$ 270	$ ---	
Contract						
Data Administration		---	(6)	240	---	
Data Processing		---	(4)	200	---	
Total	(21)	780	(16)	710	70	9
OVERHEAD/ MANAGEMENT						
Overhead		310		130	---	
Management				75	---	
Total		310		205	105	34
ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS		60		50	10	17
MANAGEMENT TIME/ KEYPUNCH		170		150	20	12
Total		$ 1,320		$ 1,115	205	15

Source: Excerpted from DOT RSPA Projected Transition Timetable, February 1987.

TABLE 3

COMPARISON OF STAFFING LEVELS

Unit	Prior staffing (All Federal, in DC)	Projected 1988 staffing Federal		Contract	
		DC	Cambridge	DC	Cambridge
DATA ADMINISTRATION					
Management & reports control	3	–	3	–	–
Data preparation	10	–	–	–	6
DATA PROCESSING	7	2	–	–	4
PUBLIC REFERENCE ROOM (Washington)	1	1	–	–	—
Total	2͟	3	3		͟0

Source: Excerpted from DOT RSPA Projected Transition Timetable, February 1987.

8

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9

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