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Title: Urgent Need for Legislative Intervention to Prevent Aviation Safety Risks from Weakening Air Traffic Radar Infrastructure in Nigeria

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Executive Summary

The Nigerian Airspace Management Agency (NAMA) has expressed serious concerns over the deteriorating condition of Nigeria's air traffic surveillance infrastructure, particularly the Total Radar Coverage of Nigeria (TRACON) system. Commissioned in the early 2000s and fully deployed around 2010, the system was designed to provide nationwide radar coverage and ensure real-time monitoring of aircraft movements. However, NAMA reports that the system has exceeded its operational lifespan, with many components now obsolete and increasingly difficult to replace due to a lack of spare parts. The Agency warns that the system is now at risk of partial or total failure, raising significant concerns for aviation safety and Nigeria's compliance with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) standards.

In addition to infrastructure decay, NAMA has highlighted financial and operational constraints, including deductions from internally generated revenue, rising operational costs, manpower shortages, limited funding for upgrades, and outstanding debts owed by airlines and airport operators. These challenges are weakening the Agency's capacity to maintain and modernise critical aviation safety infrastructure, thereby increasing operational risks within Nigeria's airspace.

The potential failure of the TRACON system raises serious safety and regulatory concerns. As a core component of air traffic surveillance, any disruption could reduce Nigeria's ability to effectively monitor and separate aircraft, particularly in busy air corridors. This may compromise flight safety, increase operational risks, and affect Nigeria's compliance with international aviation standards. In addition, persistent infrastructure gaps could undermine global confidence in Nigeria's aviation sector, with possible implications for air traffic operations, insurance costs, and airline competitiveness.

There are also concerns that without urgent investment and institutional reform, Nigeria may struggle to maintain aviation safety certification standards, while financial constraints continue to limit training, system upgrades, and operational resilience. The combination of ageing infrastructure and funding limitations presents a systemic risk to the sustainability of air traffic management in the country.

Given the strategic importance of aviation safety infrastructure, the National Assembly has a critical oversight role to ensure that Nigeria's airspace remains safe, modern, and compliant with international standards. Legislative engagement is necessary to secure sustainable funding,



strengthen institutional accountability, and prevent avoidable system failures that could endanger lives and disrupt national and international aviation operations.

Accordingly, the National Assembly, through its Committees on Aviation, may consider the following actions:

- Conduct an immediate oversight investigation by inviting NAMA to provide a detailed briefing on the operational status and risks associated with the TRACON system.
- Mandate a comprehensive technical audit of all air traffic surveillance infrastructure and require a phased modernisation and replacement roadmap.
- Review aviation funding arrangements, including revenue deductions, with consideration for ring-fencing critical safety funds.
- Support enhanced funding for air traffic controller training and technical workforce development to address manpower gaps.
- Assess debt recovery mechanisms within the aviation sector to strengthen financial sustainability and operational efficiency.

Background:

The Nigerian Airspace Management Agency (NAMA) has raised serious concerns over the deteriorating condition of Nigeria's air traffic surveillance infrastructure, particularly the Total Radar Coverage of Nigeria (TRACON) system¹.

The TRACON system, commissioned in the early 2000s and fully deployed around 2010, was designed to provide nationwide radar coverage and ensure real-time monitoring of aircraft movements across Nigerian airspace. However, NAMA's current leadership reports that the system has exceeded its operational lifespan, with many components now obsolete and difficult to replace due to lack of spare parts.

According to the Managing Director of NAMA, the system is now at risk of partial or total failure, which could significantly impair Nigeria's ability to monitor aircraft movement effectively². This development raises concerns about compliance with international aviation safety standards, particularly those set by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

In addition to infrastructure decay, NAMA has raised concerns about facing financial constraints, including deductions from internally generated revenue, rising operational costs, limited funding for upgrades, manpower shortages, and growing debts owed by airlines and airport operators³. These challenges collectively threaten the sustainability of Nigeria's aviation safety infrastructure.

¹ Akinlotan, O. (2026, April 10). Nigeria faces airspace risk as radar systems weaken. Punch.

<https://punchng.com/nigeria-faces-airspace-risk-as-radar-systems-weaken/>

² Ibid

³ Ibid



Issue:

Nigeria's air traffic surveillance system is facing a critical risk of functional collapse due to ageing radar infrastructure and inadequate maintenance and replacement capacity.

The TRACON system, which is central to aircraft monitoring and separation, is reportedly operating with obsolete components and minimal backup systems. This increases the risk of reduced surveillance coverage, which could compromise flight safety, especially in congested air corridors.

There are also concerns that Nigeria may struggle to meet international aviation safety standards if the system is not urgently upgraded or replaced. This could affect international confidence in Nigeria's aviation sector and potentially impact air traffic operations, insurance costs, and airline operations.

Furthermore, financial and institutional constraints within NAMA are limiting its capacity to modernise infrastructure, train personnel, and maintain operational resilience.

Rationale for Legislative Actions:

Aviation safety infrastructure is a critical national asset with direct implications for human safety, economic activity, and Nigeria's international obligations.

Legislative oversight is required to ensure that:

- Air traffic surveillance systems remain fully functional, modern, and compliant with ICAO standards
- Adequate and sustainable funding mechanisms exist for aviation safety infrastructure.
- Revenue deductions and funding policies do not undermine operational safety obligations.
- Nigeria maintains international aviation credibility and safety certification standards.
- Risks of system failure are addressed proactively rather than reactively.

Without urgent intervention, systemic failures in radar surveillance could expose Nigeria's airspace to avoidable operational risks and reputational damage.

Recommendations to the National Assembly:

The National Assembly, through its Committees on Aviation, is respectfully urged to:

1. **Conduct an Immediate Oversight Investigation:** Summon the leadership of the Nigerian Airspace Management Agency (NAMA) to provide a comprehensive briefing on the current operational status of the TRACON system and to assess risks associated with obsolete radar and air surveillance infrastructure.
2. **Mandate an Infrastructure Audit and Modernisation Plan:** Require NAMA to immediately undertake a full technical audit of all air traffic surveillance systems, and to develop a phased modernisation and replacement roadmap for submission to the relevant committees on Aviation within a defined timeframe.



3. **Review Aviation Funding Structure:** Examine the impact of current revenue deductions on aviation safety operations, and consider the ring-fencing of critical safety funds to ensure sustained infrastructure maintenance, upgrades, and operational efficiency.
4. **Strengthen Workforce Capacity and Training:** Support dedicated funding for air traffic controller training and broader technical capacity development, with the aim of addressing manpower shortages within aviation safety institutions.
5. **Assess Debt Recovery and Financial Stability Mechanisms:** Review outstanding debts owed to aviation agencies and evaluate existing enforcement mechanisms for cost recovery within the sector, with a view to identifying gaps that may require legislative intervention.

Conclusion

The warning from the Nigerian Airspace Management Agency suggests an urgent and systemic risk to aviation safety infrastructure in Nigeria.

The potential degradation of radar surveillance capability poses not only operational risks but also significant implications for international aviation compliance and national economic stability.

Proactive legislative intervention is required to ensure infrastructure renewal, sustainable funding, and regulatory compliance, thereby safeguarding Nigeria's airspace and maintaining public confidence in the aviation sector.

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