Domestic Datalink Services (DDLS) FY2026 Market Survey

DISCLAIMER: The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is not seeking or accepting unsolicited proposals.

This is not a solicitation.

This notice is not a Screening Information Request (SIR) or a Request for Proposal (RFP) of any kind.

This notice serves as performance of an FAA market analysis in accordance with AMS Procurement Guidance T3.2.1.2.A.

This notice should not be construed as a commitment of any type by the FAA to take or not take any action.

Participation in this market survey is voluntary and appreciated.

No evaluation letters or results will be issued to respondents.

The Government will not pay for any information received in response to this request, nor will the Government compensate any respondent for any costs incurred in developing the information provided to the Government. Mark PROPRIETARY on all documents submitted with data rights that need to be to protected.

This notice does not restrict the FAA to an acquisition approach it may take in connection with the requirement, nor does it restrict changes to any Statement of Work or other requirements.

The FAA has the option of conducting one-on-one communications as deemed appropriate without the obligation to hold communications with all respondents.

A business entity responding to this notice neither qualifies respondents for, nor excludes respondents from, responding to a resulting SIR, if any.

1.1 Synopsis: This is a Market Survey for Domestic Datalink Services (DDLS). The requirement is to provide Domestic Data Link (DDL) service to the Federal Aviation Administration to support the EnRoute Automation Modernization System (ERAM) and Tower datalink System (TDLS). The telecommunications service consists of routing and delivery of messages used as the communications part of Air Traffic Control (ATC) services which are used by FAA ATC automation systems and aircraft operating in Domestic NAS airspace. Telecommunication services must be provided to the Air Traffic Control Towers (ATCTs) and the En Route Air Route Traffic Control Centers (ARTCC), the William J. Hughes Technical Center (WJHTC), and at other ATC related sites as specified by the Government in the domestic NAS. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is performing market research to determine if there are potential vendors who can provide cost effective and demonstrable solutions for DDLS.

1.2 Purpose: The FAA is exploring different approaches to providing Controller to Pilot Data Link Communication (CPDLC) services for airports and en route airspace after the Data Communication Integrated Services (DCIS) contract expires on September 30, 2029.

2.1 Background: Currently, CPDLC is operational at all 20 Continental United States (CONUS) Centers and Departure Clearance (DCL) services are provided at 65 airports. A robust set of Initial CPDLC Services has been deployed across the CONUS National Airspace System (NAS) and the Data Communications Program is in the process of finishing the deployment of Full Services, an additional set of CPDLC messages.

2.2 The current implementation of CPDLC services employs the En Route Automation Modernization (ERAM) system enabling trained air traffic controllers to send Future Air Navigation Services (FANS) compatible ATC messages. These messages are routed internally within the FAA's network to a security gateway where they are then passed to the DCIS provider who in turn routes the messages to appropriate communication providers. The messages are then transmitted to FANS equipped aircraft primarily using the Very High Frequency (VHF) Data Link Mode 2 (VDL-2) protocol where the messages are routed to the Flight Management System (FMS) for pilot action. Pilots can downlink responses to ATC messages in addition to sending a defined but limited set of requests to controllers.

2.3 The current DCIS contract consists of a 7-year base period followed by ten 1-year options. Currently year 14 of the contract is nearing completion.

3.1 Program Objectives: Based upon experience over the contract timeframe, the Data Comm program is considering establishing one or possibly multiple 10-year contracts and has come to value the following objectives:

- Provide excellent, reliable, end-to-end performance of CPDLC through direct engagement with accountable providers,
- Receive accurate and timely insight into the status of all ATC CPDLC messages and the state of the network transporting them,
- Obtain services that are affordable and realize price efficiencies over time,
- Enable the introduction of new technologies in a seamless, non-disruptive, cost-effective manner, and
- Facilitate a transition from DCIS to DDLS that minimizes technical and operational risk.

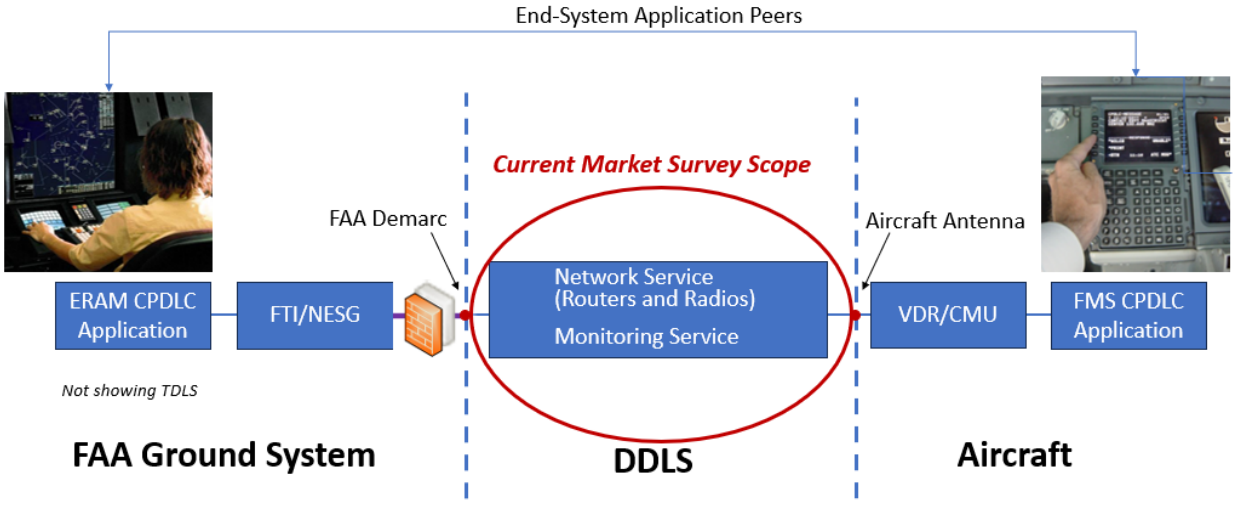
4.1 Scope of this Market Survey: As described in the background section Data Communications functionality is delivered through an end-to-end system-of-systems. The primary scope of this market survey is for the provision of operational network services and associated monitoring as shown in the figure below. Under the current DCIS contract, combination of the operational network service and monitoring service is referred to as the Data Communications Network Service (DCNS).

FTI – FAA Telecommunication Infrastructure

NESG – National Airspace System (NAS) Enterprise Security Gateway

VDR- Very High Frequency (V) Data Radio

CMU- Communication management Unit



5.1 Questions to Industry: Industry answers to the following questions will be helpful in determining the approach used for the follow-on contract(s), Domestic Data Link Services (DDLS).

1. <u>Company Background & Interest</u>
    a. Please provide a brief synopsis about your company (subsidiary & division if applicable), its future interests in CPDLC services, its capabilities to perform future CPDLC services, any small business status it holds, and if it has any current role in US Domestic CPDLC services.
    b. Would you classify yourself as an interested bidder at this time?
    c. What issues will impact your decision to be bidder or not?
    d. If you are not interested in DDLS for the purposes of submitting a proposal if requested in the future, what are your interests involving DDLS acquisition?
2. <u>Acquisition Design</u>
    a. What aspects or approaches could the program introduce into the acquisition that would strongly incentivize performance, and which don't effectively impose a tax or escalation on any service prices? Are there specific incentives for performance, both positive and negative, that would engender the best network performance?
    b. How can the program and DDLS contract structure facilitate the introduction and use of new technologies seamlessly throughout the life of a contract?
    c. What acquisition approaches could the program consider to increase the competitive field of respondents, but which doesn't expose the program to excessive risk from unproven solutions?
    d. The current DCIS contract was structured as an integrator model for the re-establishment of domestic Data Communications in the NAS, but after nearly 12 years of operational service for DCL on the surface and over 7 years of operational use in the en route environment with mature automation applications as well as substantial equipage, does an integrator model still make sense for DDLS? Should alternate provider models be considered? If so, what models?
    e. What do you consider to be the top advantages and/or challenges associated with the use of one contract for DDLS that employs the use of internetworking arrangements between

commercial service providers? If there are challenges, what are the feasible set of mitigations?

f. Do you recommend that program consider a single award, multiple awards, an award to all parties demonstrating/qualifying a specific capability, or another model and why? How does your recommendation support the program objectives identified above?

3. Operations
   a. How can the program ensure that the monitoring information it receives accurately reflects the true state of the system and it adequately tracks the status and performance of CPDLC messages and any impacts or degradations to the operational path the CPDLC message traverses?
   b. What metrics do you suggest to measure the end-to-end success of the communications process from the applications across networks and through the security gateways? What metrics are necessary and sufficient for tracking network performance?
   c. What types of monitoring and diagnostic tools and technology can provide the FAA with real-time network visibility? Must these necessarily be supplied by the DDLS provider(s) or are there other approaches to obtaining this status information?
   d. What recommendations do you have for the monitoring, troubleshooting, and mitigating of Radio Frequency Interference (RFI) or rogue transmissions affecting an air-to-ground network?
   e. What successful communication activities have you employed to improve reporting, issue communication, contract performance discussions, and the customer/vendor working relationship? How have you assessed what is working, what is not working, and what improvements could be made?
4. Technical Topics
   a. The program is anticipating specifying the following performance requirements: reliability, maintainability, availability, latency, uplink success percentage [1], and integrity for both the operational service and the monitoring service. Are there any other performance requirements that must be specified?
   b. The program is anticipating specifying the following functional requirements: coverage, routing and forwarding. Are there any other functional requirements that must be specified?
   c. The requirements for DDLS will mandate that movement and non-movement areas at 65 airports, the arrival and departure flows from these airports as well as CONUS Class A Airspace have coverage. Airport construction and airspace redesign will occur throughout the lifecycle of DDLS. How do you envision providing a network that responds to these changes without imposing financial shocks to the program based on change requests or that has inflated costs to manage the risk of occurrence?
   d. Can the functional and performance requirements be technology agnostic, yet still support the use of the FANS application in aircraft?

[1] The uplink success percentage represents the percentage of controller-initiated uplinks for which there is proof that the aircraft received the uplink. Currently, proof is provided by either a successful message assurance response or a pilot response.

e. Explain how would supersonic flights be accommodated within the NAS?
f. What recommendations do you have on how the program can specify security requirements in a manner that aligns contractors with evolving security standards and requirement revisions, but which do not require constant contract change?
g. What risks are associated with spectrum allocation to maintain and provide for future growth of traffic on the transmission media you are considering using? How would you mitigate these risks?
h. What promising emerging technologies and providers of air-to-ground connectivity suitable for ATC messages should the Data Comm program be following? What is the expected number of equipped aircraft for these emerging technologies over the next year, 5-years, and 10-years?
i. What are the main constraints to providing a scalable air-to-ground network today? In three years?
j. Do you have any estimates on when there will be noticeable traffic reductions/contractions on VHF air-to-ground data networks? What will be the drivers of these contractions?
k. What recommendations do you have on managing configuration changes to a DDLS network, including how changes would be evaluated and tested before implementation to ensure they do not degrade the service or create system failures? How would those changes be tracked, documented, and reported to the FAA over time?
l. What internal continuous improvement processes do you recommend for network performance, customer-reported failures, service degradations, and areas where the network service falls short of expectations? How have you identified, prioritized, implemented, and reported service improvements throughout the life of a service? Where have you seen success with the use of these processes, where have you seen failures, and why?
m. To what extent can the delivery of ATC messages be prioritized?
n. What test approach would you recommend to support the testing and evaluation of network enhancements, new avionics, operational issues, regression risk, and integration with the En Route and Surface automation platforms, ground-to-ground network, air-to-ground network, and aircraft avionics to ensure there is the least amount of risk exposed to the end-to-end operation as possible? Is there a specific configuration you would use? How would this support the deployment of an enhancement and not jeopardize end-to-end performance or function?

5. <u>Transition from DCIS to DDLS</u>
    a. What do you consider the significant operational, technical, and programmatic challenges and risks during a like-for-like transition from incumbent to new provider? How can these challenges and risks be mitigated?
    b. What do you consider the significant operational, technical and programmatic challenges and risks with a single award where the incumbent is the successful offeror? How can these challenges and risks be mitigated?

c. What do you consider the significant operational, technical, and programmatic challenges and risks during a one-to-many transition from incumbent integrator with subcontractors to multiple qualified providers? How can these challenges and risks be mitigated?
d. Based on your experience, what are the most likely problems that will be encountered during a transition from DCIS to DDLS and do you have any recommendations on how these can be mitigated? Is there a minimum period the transition should be for the scenarios identified in questions 5.a, 5.b, and 5.c?
e. How transparent can a transition be to pilots, dispatchers, and controllers for the scenarios identified in questions 5.a, 5.b, and 5.c? What aspects can't be transparent for each of the scenarios?
f. What strategy would you propose to make the transition as operationally transparent to end-to-end users as possible? What strategies would be implemented to ensure the transition remains operationally transparent? What tools would you use to monitor the transition? How would you communicate this transition plans to impacted users?

6.1 Industry Response Parameters

-Responses to this Market Survey must contain "DDLS FY2026 Market Survey Response [Company Name]" in the subject line of the email.

-All responses must be submitted in writing and in the English language. Oral responses will not be accepted. Page size must be 8-1/2 by 11 inches with one-inch margins. The text font must be in Times New Roman 12-point. Please note that the FAA email server restricts file sizes to ten (10) megabytes per email. Larger files must be submitted in more than one email or zip file. Additionally, labeling responses according to the question numbering above will accelerate the review process.

-The response format should be a searchable PDF. The FAA appreciates thoughtful, succinct responses. A page limit is not enforced, but 30 pages or less will assist the reviewers in assimilating the information provided.

-Submissions must include the following information for one or more points of contact for the respondent: name, title, telephone number, and email address.

-To the extent that information submitted in response to this Market Survey is proprietary or otherwise confidential commercial information, the vendor MUST CLEARLY MARK that portion of the response that contains the proprietary/confidential information with a restrictive legend and must provide justification to the FAA of such designation if requested. Please separate proprietary/confidential information. Proprietary/confidential information will be for the sole use of the FAA and will be treated appropriately with regards to the markings. This paragraph in no way alters the FAA's obligations under existing law, however, including any duties owed by the FAA under the Freedom of Information Act. Please be advised that all submissions become Government property and will not be returned.

7.1 Question(s) Due Date: Questions regarding this Market Survey are requested no later than 5 pm. EDT., August 18, 2026. Questions must be provided in the attached template format "698KA8-DDLS FY2026 - MS Question & Answer Form". Please direct your responses to Pearl Winston, Contracting Officer at Pearl.A.Winston@FAA.gov and 9-AJO-AJM-DDLS@faa.gov.

7.2 The FAA's response to questions will be answered via an amendment and posted on SAM.Gov by August 25, 2025. One concise response will be provided for repeated questions. The FAA will not attribute the questions to the submitting Vendors, but the text of the questions and answers may be available to the general public. Source/vendor, identified proprietary and confidential information will be removed. Any information concerning the Market Survey given to any Vendor will be furnished to all other Vendors via Sam.gov.

8.1 Response Due Date: Responses are requested no later than 5 pm. EDT., September 9, 2026. Please direct your responses to Pearl Winston, Contracting Officer at Pearl.A.Winston@FAA.gov and 9-AJO-AJM-DDLS@faa.gov.

9.1 Future Activities: The Data Comm program anticipates conducting an Industry Day in late summer / early fall, which will include one-on-one sessions with interested parties. Answers to the above questions will help the program identify topics to more thoroughly cover during the industry day and will help prepare the program for one-on-one conversations.

9.2 The FAA anticipates releasing a SIR for the DDLS requirements in the Second quarter of FY2029.

9.3 The FAA is under no obligation to meet the projected solicitation release window.

Acronym List:

Acronym	Description
ACARS	Aircraft Communications Addressing and Reporting System
AMS	Acquisition Management System
AOC	Airline Operations Control
ATC	Air Traffic Control
ATS	Air Traffic Services
BEP	Back End Processor
CPDLC	Controller Pilot Data Link Communication
CSP	Commercial Service Provider
DDLS	Domestic Datalink Services
DDLSNSD	DDLS Data Communications Network Service Description
eFAST	Electronic Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Accelerated and Simplified Tasks (eFAST)
ERAM	En Route Automation Modernization
FAA	Federal Aviation Administration
FANS	Future Air Navigation Services
FIPS	Federal Information Processing Standards
FISMA	Federal Information Security Management Act
FEP	Front End Processor
GW	Gateway
IPS	Internet Protocol Suite
MMIXM	Maintenance Management Information Exchange Model
MOAs	Memorandum of Agreement
MS	Market Survey
NAS	National Airspace System
NEMS	NAS Enterprise Messaging System

NESG	NAS Enterprise Security Gateway
NIS	NAS Infrastructure Service
NIST	National Institute of Standards and Technology
OEM	Original Equipment Manufacturer
PGW	Protocol Gateway
PM	Program Manager
POC	Point of Contact
RF	Radio Frequency
RFP	Request for Proposal
RMLS	Remote Maintenance Logging System
SAM	System for Award Management
SATCOM	Satellite Communications
SDVOSB	Service-Disabled Veteran-owned Small Business
SOW	Statement of Work
SPEC	Specification
SWIM	System-Wide Information Management
TDLS	Tower Data Link System
TMS	Tower Information Management System
VDL	VHF Data Link
VDL-2	VHF Data Link Mode 2
VHF	Very High Frequency