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Airspace System relying more heavily on autonomous systems — in cockpits, in air traffic control towers and on board unmanned aircraft.

Assured autonomy, as NASA calls it, will allow operations that would otherwise exceed the limits of human cognitive performance, said John Cavolowsky, director of the Airspace Operations and Safety Program at NASA's Aeronautics Research Mission Directorate.

"Autonomy overcomes the limits and enables performance that will exceed our abilities," he said. "We know this from the history of technology."

Autonomous aircraft could be certified for operations in the NAS by 2035, said Doug Rohn, director of the Transformative Aeronautics Concepts Program at the mission directorate.

Over the next two years, NASA