



U.S. Contract Tower Association Annual Report

2000



USCTA

U.S. Contract Tower Association

an affiliated organization of the American Association of Airport Executives

2000 USCTA Policy Board

James Hansford, A.A.E., manager, Central Wisconsin Airport, Chair
Jack Schelter, A.A.E., deputy director of aviation at Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport, Vice Chair
Rick Baird, manager, Freidman Memorial Airport, Hailey, Idaho
Jim Chappell, airport manager, Salinas, Calif., Municipal Airport
Shane Cordes, executive vice president, Midwest ATC
Bryan Elliott, A.A.E., executive director, Charlottesville, Va., Albemarle Airport Authority
Roger Engstrom, A.A.E., airports manager, Mobile, Ala., Airport Authority
Bill Gatchell, C.M., airports supervisor, Lea County Airports, N.M.
Richard Howell, A.A.E., director, S.W. Georgia Regional Airport in Albany, Ga.
Glenn Januska, A.A.E., manager, Waukesha, Wis., County Airport
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Jerry O'Sullivan, manager, Greenbrier Valley Airport, W. Va.
Tim Rogers, A.A.E., executive director of the Salina, Kan., Airport Authority
Ted Soliday, executive director, Naples, Fla., Airport Authority
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Walt Strong, C.M., administrator, Max Westheimer (Okla.) Airport

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Foreword



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FAA Contract Tower Program Overview

Through its Contract Tower Program, FAA contracts air traffic control (ATC) services to the private sector at visual flight rule (VFR) airports. Since its inception in 1982, the program has received positive endorsements from all parties involved, including Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), the Department of Transportation (DOT) Inspector General (IG), airport management, Congress and, most importantly, the users of the aviation system.

By the end of 2000, 199 airports with VFR towers were participating in the program. Airport managers note that government budget constraints could force the closure of many of these facilities if they were not part of the FAA Contract Tower Program.

The primary advantages of the contract tower program are enhanced safety, improved ATC services and significant VFR ATC cost savings to FAA. The private sector can operate a Level I VFR tower at half the cost paid by the federal government for the same services. FAA's annual cost per Level I tower is approximately \$580,000 versus approximately \$290,000 for contract towers. As a result, the annual savings to FAA as a result of the program are estimated at \$40 million. Additionally, FAA contract towers receive continuous oversight and monitoring by the FAA and all contract controllers are certified by the FAA. Members of Congress and DOT/FAA point to this program as an example of how FAA, in partnership with local governments and the private sector, can provide an important service to aviation users at a substantially reduced cost to taxpayers.

The American Association of Airport Executives (AAAE) created the U.S. Contract Tower Association (USCTA) in 1996 to promote the contract tower program and to increase aviation safety at smaller airports. USCTA coordinates contract tower issues on a regular basis with Congress, DOT/FAA, NTSB, the General Accounting Office (GAO) and the DOT IG.

In 2000, USCTA received oversight from a Policy Board comprised of the following members:

James Hansford, A.A.E., manager, the Central Wisconsin Airport, Chair
Jack Schelter, A.A.E., deputy director, aviation at Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport, Vice Chair
Rick Baird, manager, Freidman Memorial Airport, Hailey, Idaho
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Spencer Dickerson, executive vice president of AAAE, is executive director, USCTA. Consultants to USCTA are the Honorable **Linda Hall Daschle** and **Bert Randall** of Baker Donelson Bearman & Caldwell; **Patrick McCann** of the Wexler Group, and **Larry Barnett** of AB Management Associates.



USCTA Members as of January 2001:

State of Alaska
Hawaii Department of Transportation
Mobile Downtown Airport (Ala.)
City of Phoenix Aviation Department (Ariz.)
Mesa/Williams Gateway (Ariz.)
Glendale Municipal Airport (Ariz.)
Flagstaff (Ariz.) Pulliam Airport
Laughlin/Bullhead City (Ariz.) International
Tucson (Ariz.) Airport Authority
Sacramento (Calif.) County Department of Airports
San Carlos Airport (Calif.)
San Luis Obispo County Airport (Calif.)
Modesto City-County Airport (Calif.)
Los Angeles County Aviation Division (Calif.)
Ramona Airport-County of San Diego (Calif.)
San Diego (Calif.) Brown Field
Redding (Calif.) Municipal Airport
Salinas (Calif.) Municipal Airport
Santa Maria Public Airport District (Calif.)
Eagle County (Colo.) Regional
Waterbury-Oxford Airport (Conn.)
Boca Raton Airport (Fla.)
Jacksonville/Craig (Fla.) Airport
Kissimmee (Fla.)
Martin County StuartWhitham Airport (Fla.)
Naples Municipal Airport (Fla.)
Titusville-Cocoa Airport (Fla.)
Page Field (Fla.)
Lakeland (Fla.) Linder Regional Airport
Vandenberg Airport (Tampa, Fla.)
Southwest Georgia Regional Airport
Cobb County-McCollum Field Airport (Ga.)
Friedman Memorial Airport (Idaho)
Pocatello (Idaho) Regional Airport
Waukegan Regional Airport (Ill.)
Meigs Field (Ill.)
Quincy (Ill.) Municipal Airport
Southern Illinois Airport
St. Louis Regional Airport (Ill.)
Williamson County Regional Airport (Ill.)
Columbus (Ind.)
Municipal Airport
Delaware County Airport (Muncie, Ind.)
Johnson County Municipal Airport (Kan.)
Salina Municipal Airport (Kan.)
Manhattan (Kan.) Regional Airport
Garden City Regional Airport (Kan.)
Paducah Airport (Ky.)
Salisbury-Ocean City Wicomico (Md.) Regional Airport
Martin State Airport (Md.)
Westfield Barnes Airport (Mass.)
Worcester (Mass.) Regional Airport
Minneapolis-St. Paul Metropolitan Airports Commission
(Anoka County Airport)
W.K. Kellogg Airport (Mich.)
Jackson Municipal (Miss.)
Joplin Regional Airport (Mo.)
Jefferson City Memorial Airport (Mo.)
Glacier Park (Mont.) International
Gallatin Field (Mont.)
Missoula (Mont.)
Central Nebraska Regional Airport
Henderson (Nev.) Executive Airport
Lebanon (N.H.) Municipal
Nashua (N.H.) Airport Authority
Lea County Airports (N.M.)
Kinston Regional Jetport (N.C.)
Hickory Regional Airport (N.C.)
Bolton Field (Columbus, Ohio)
Cleveland Burke Lakefront Airport (Ohio)
Cuyahoga County Airport (Ohio)
Cincinnati Municipal-Lunken Airport (Ohio)
Max Westheimer Field (Okla.)
Redmond Municipal Airport (Ore.)
Rogue Valley (Ore.) International
Arnold Palmer Regional Airport (Latrobe, Pa.)
Greenville Downtown Airport (S.C.)
Hilton Head (S.C.)
Horry County Department of Airports (Myrtle Beach, S.C.)
Smyrna Rutherford County (Tenn.)
Jackson Madison County Airport (Tenn.)
Stinson Municipal Airport (San Antonio, Texas)
Laredo International Airport (Texas)
Harlingen Valley International (Texas)
Brownsville/South Padre Island International (Texas)
Grand Prairie Municipal Airport (Texas)
Spinks Airport (Texas)
Charlottesville-Albemarle Airport (Va.)
Spokane (Wash.)
Walla Walla Municipal Airport (Wash.)
Olympia Airport (Wash.)
Wheeling-Ohio County Airport (W.Va.)
Greenbrier Valley Airport (W.Va.)
Chippewa Valley (Wis.) Regional Airport
Milwaukee Timmerman (Wis.) Airport
LaCrosse (Wis.) Municipal
Central Wisconsin Airport (Wis.)
Outagamie County (Wis.) Regional Airport
Waukesha County Airport (Wis.)
Cheyenne (Wyo.) Airport
Jackson Hole (Wyo.) Airport
Midwest Air Traffic Control Services Inc.
COMARCO Airport Services
Serco Management Services
RVA Inc.
Unitech
AJT & Associates Inc.
Litton Denro

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Survey Says.

The USCTA Policy Board in December 2000 electronically distributed a survey to members on their perceptions of the value of USCTA services and membership.

As part of the survey, participating airports were asked about new initiatives that USCTA could undertake to benefit contract tower airports. Among the items mentioned that will be pursued by the USCTA Policy Board in 2001 are (1) making contract tower construction and equipment eligible for AIP entitlement grants; (2) encouraging more contact between ATC companies and airport management; (3) improving coordination between sole-source contract tower airports and FAA headquarters; (4) working on installing stand-alone displays (i.e., D-Brite, TARDIS, etc.) in contract towers; (5) coordinating liability insurance issues for contract towers; (6) surveying contract tower airports about future equipment needs, and (7) working with FAA to improve dissemination of benefit/cost ratios to all contract towers on an annual basis.

The following summary reflects responses to the survey received as of Jan. 1, 2001:

- 95 percent of members rated as “excellent or very good” the association’s legislative representation on

Capitol Hill to promote programs of importance to contract tower airports (such as full funding of contract towers and cost sharing).

- 85 percent rated as “excellent or very good” the printed bi-monthly USCTA newsletter.
- 94 percent rated as “excellent or very good” the association’s e-mail alerts concerning contract tower developments in Washington, D.C.
- 80 percent rated as “excellent or very good” the USCTA annual report.
- 70 percent rated as “excellent or very good” the USCTA/FAA annual Contract Tower Workshop.
- 60 percent rated as “excellent or very good” the contract tower session at AAAE’s annual conference.
- 89 percent rated as “excellent or very good” USCTA’s liaison and coordination with FAA’s Contract Tower Office.
- 71 percent rated as “excellent or very good” USCTA’s liaison and coordination with NTSB and DOT’s Inspector General.
- 59 percent rated as “excellent or very good” the association’s interviews of key Washington policy makers on contract tower developments on AAAE’s ANTN Digicast and Aviation News Today.



That's the question USCTA asked members in the recent electronically distributed survey. Here's just a sample of what USCTA members are saying about the value of USCTA products and services:

—"The FAA Contract Tower at the Hickory (N.C.) Airport would not be a reality without the USCTA. Keep up the outstanding work."

—"I believe the overall success of the USCTA is vital to the contract tower program with the increased pressure that other labor

notification to USCTA members of these events, so that we can respond to Congress and FAA. You're doing a great job...stay with it!"

—"You folks are GREAT! Without you looking out for our interests, we would be using smoke signals to control traffic. Keep doing what you're doing!"

—"AAAE/USCTA has greatly benefited the steady, positive growth in the contract tower industry. Thanks to everyone involved for another productive year!"

How Are We Doing?

USCTA Members Tell It Like It Is.

organizations are placing on the Senators and Representatives. I appreciate the hard work of the staff of the association in keeping airport managers informed. Keep up the excellent service."

—"Your efforts on behalf of the program, the airports and service providers is greatly appreciated. We are fully aware of the very positive impact that your efforts are having on the continuation and promotion of the contract tower program."

—"You are doing a great job. My airport has a tower, thanks to you guys. I am proud to serve on the USCTA Board of Directors and believe we are in the vanguard of outsourcing that FAA must do in the future. The staff is wonderful and responsive. We have had only good dealings with them."

—"Very helpful. I believe it is safe to say, if it wasn't for USCTA, there would be over 100 airports nationwide without tower service."

—"The proof of their effectiveness is in the positive results and the common sense changes to the program that have occurred. Our confidence is high that we are being properly represented."

—"I believe that USCTA awareness of events on the Hill is critical to the long-term viability of the program. Equally important is USCTA staff making subsequent and timely

—"As (as far as I know) I'm the only active air traffic controller attending the last three FCT workshops at L'Enfant Plaza each July, I am always impressed by the energy and unwavering commitment to the program demonstrated by USCTA, as well as all the airport members. While there are functions of AAEE and USCTA that are beyond my area of training and experience, I can't think of a thing you could do to improve your helpfulness and effectiveness. Thank you and please keep it up!"

—"The staff does a great job in keeping the members informed of any issues regarding the contract tower program."

—"Exemplary staff and well organized to meet our local needs. Thank you for doing a tremendous job for us."

—"They keep us members well informed and involved. Excellent work!"

—"Staff rapport with FAA, NTSB and the contract ATC is excellent. Even the NATCA representatives appear to hold USCTA in high regard. It bodes well for the USCTA members when AAEE staff can approach the union in a reasonable and objective manner."

—"As a contract tower airport, we deeply appreciate having a knowledgeable advocate in DC to protect our fragile funding."

USCTA Activities and FAA Contract Tower Developments in 2000

The final House-Senate conference report language on FAA's Contract Tower Program contained in the fiscal year 2001 DOT/FAA appropriations bill signed by President Clinton is very positive for the program in several areas.

The conference report provides full funding for the regular contract tower program at \$55.3 million in addition to \$5 million for the cost-sharing program; directs FAA not to cut contract tower program funding as it attempted to do earlier in 2000, and requires FAA to treat all scheduled commercial service aircraft with 10 or more seats the same in the benefit/cost criteria.

The report language is as follows:

“Contract tower program funding: The conference agreement provides \$55,300,000 for the contract tower program, which is the amount assumed in the budget estimate.

FAA is directed not to reprogram these funds to any other activity or to reduce them to satisfy budget shortfalls which may develop throughout the fiscal year. In addition, the conference agreement includes \$5,000,000 for the contract tower cost-sharing program.

“Contract tower program extension: The conferees agree with Senate direction to the FAA Administrator to submit the overdue report on this program, but do not agree with the Senate direction that this report should include a timeline for expanding the program. In addition, the report should address recent findings and recommendations of the DOT Inspector General regarding expansion of the contract tower program.

“Criteria for contract tower program eligibility: The conferees believe that FAA's contract tower program has worked well from both the government's perspective and the users' perspective. Through this program, many aircraft are able to operate more efficiently and safely into airports with contract towers, where FAA-operated towers would otherwise not be available due to prohibitive costs.

“The conferees are concerned, however, that the traffic counts used to establish eligibility for the contract tower program, and for establishment of certain navigation aids, are erroneous in that certain part 121 operations, including regional jets, are not being classified as air carrier operations. After promulgation of FAA's 'one level of safety' rule, the conferees believe that such a distinction is no longer justified. The FAA is urged to change promptly its traffic count methodology to conform to the changes in operator classification brought about by the one level of safety rulemaking.

“Specific designations for the contract tower program: The conferees do not agree with Senate direction to include certain airports in the contract tower program. However, the conferees understand that the Boca Raton, Olive Branch, Henderson, and Tupelo Municipal airports are eligible for this program, and encourage FAA to include those airports in the program if they meet eligibility criteria.”



The FAA Reauthorization bill (AIR-21) signed into law in 2000 by President Clinton contains a provision to allow two airports to use their Airport Improvement Program (AIP) entitlement funds to construct control towers for inclusion in the FAA contract tower program.

A legislative initiative for USCTA and AAAE in 2001 will be to support making tower construction and the purchase of ATC equipment eligible for Airport Improvement Program (AIP) entitlements. This would include airports that do not currently have a tower but are interested in gaining admission to FAA's Contract Tower Program.

AIR-21 contains the FAA contract tower cost-sharing provision supported by AAAE and USCTA, as well as language implementing the Terminal Radar Display Information system (TARDIS).

While the legislation authorizes the contract tower cost-sharing program, appropriations language must

be approved annually to continue this funding and maintain cost-sharing separately from the regular contract tower program.

In selecting facilities to participate in the cost-sharing program, DOT is required to give priority to:

- air traffic control towers that are participating in FAA's Contract Tower Program but have been notified that they will be dropped from the program due to a benefit-to-cost (b/c) ratio that is less than 1.0.
- towers have a b/c ratio of a least .50.
- FAA towers that remain closed as a result of the air traffic controllers strike in 1981.
- towers located at airports or points at which an air carrier is receiving compensation under the Essential Air Service program.
- towers located at airports that are prepared to assume partial responsibility for maintenance costs.
- towers located at airports with safety or operational problems related to topography, weather, runway configuration or mix of aircraft.
- towers located at an airport at which the community has been operating the tower at its own expense.

For airports applying for the cost-sharing program, FAA will give priority to facilities with b/c ratios of at least .50. This does not mean, however, that airports with b/c's below .50 cannot participate.

Congress approved \$5 million in fiscal year 2001 for the cost-sharing element of FAA's Contract Tower Program.

Facilities already participating in the cost-sharing program are: New Century Air Center (Kan.); Central Nebraska/Grand Island (Neb.); Bolton Field (Ohio); Olympia (Wash.); McKellar-Sipes Regional (Tenn.); Hickory Regional (N.C.); Grand Strand/Myrtle Beach (S.C.); Springdale Municipal (Ark.); Salinas Municipal (Calif.); Shreveport Downtown (La.); Muncie (Ind.), and Garden City (Kan.).

Other towers expected in the near future to participate in the cost-sharing program are: Latrobe, Pa.; Beaver County, Pa.; Bloomington, Ind.; Olive Branch, Miss.; Chennault (La.) International; Stillwater, Okla.; Henderson, Nev; Concord, N.C.; Victorville, Calif.; Columbus, Ind.; Sawyer Airport (Mich.); Kalispell, Mont., and Knoxville Downtown (Tenn.).

Early in 2000, AAAE/USCTA sent letters to leaders of the House and Senate appropriations committees, urging the lawmakers to support full funding of \$55.3 million for FAA's Contract Tower Program in fiscal year 2001, as well as an additional \$5 million for the contract tower cost-sharing program.

AAAE/USCTA pointed out that the value of the contract tower program has been validated in several audits by DOT's Inspector General. The IG has concluded that the contract tower program improves ATC safety, provides approximately \$30 million in annual ATC cost savings to FAA, enhances regional airline service opportunities and increases economic productivity in smaller communities all across the country. The program has benefited from strong and consistent congressional backing, the associations noted, adding that "participating airports and aviation users universally express support for the contract tower program, which receives strong oversight by the FAA on a regular basis."

Letters went to: Rep. C.W. Bill Young (R-Fla.), chairman of the House Appropriations Committee; Rep. David Obey (D-Wis.), ranking member, House Appropriations Committee; Rep. Frank Wolf (R-Va.), chairman, House transportation appropriations sub-

committee; Rep. Martin Sabo (D-Minn.), ranking member, House transportation appropriations subcommittee; Sen. Ted Stevens (R-Alaska), chairman, Senate Appropriations Committee; Sen. Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.), ranking member, Senate Appropriations Committee; Sen. Richard Shelby (R-Ala.), chairman, Senate transportation appropriations subcommittee, and Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.), ranking member, Senate transportation appropriations subcommittee.





Contract air traffic control towers continue to provide services comparable to the quality and safety of FAA-staffed facilities, the

U.S. Department of Transportation Department of Transportation's Inspector General

(IG) concluded in a review released April 12, 2000. The IG further recommended that FAA revisit a draft study on expanding the program to add information demonstrating the program's value in cost savings and other measurable benefits.

The report to Congress—a followup to a 1998 audit—centered on whether staffing shortages identified earlier at certain contract towers had been corrected and whether FAA's study on expanding the program to include 71 visual flight rules (VFR) took into account all relevant benefits offered by contract arrangements.

Deputy IG Alexis Stefani concluded that the staffing issues uncovered in the 1998 audit have been corrected. She said the IG's staff tested payroll records for a two-month period at 37 contract towers and found that contractors did provide the required number of employees and hours within 2 percent of the contractual requirements. In addition, she pointed out that FAA's new contract solicitation contains specific requirements for contractors to report and certify on a monthly basis the number of controllers at each location and the hours they worked.

Currently, the contract tower program saves FAA about \$250,000 per tower each year, the IG calculated, plus provides service at facilities that FAA would not staff due to the expense to operate them. Further, the level of operational errors in fiscal year 1999 at contract towers (.05 errors per 100,000 operations) was comparable to the level of operational

errors at FAA VFR towers (.06 errors per 100,000 operations).

Congress last year directed FAA to study whether additional savings could be realized by expanding the program beyond the current low-activity towers to FAA-operated facilities without radar capability. The agency's ATC services now include 71 VFR towers employing about 960 controllers, the IG noted. The IG devoted a substantial amount of the new review to FAA's as yet unfinished study of expanding the program to the 71 VFR towers.

While noting that any decision to expand the program is ultimately a policy determination that Congress will have to make, the IG said FAA's draft study "did not adequately consider several key factors of the feasibility, costs and benefits of expanding the program that should be further analyzed and reported to Congress."

First, the IG said, FAA narrowly defined the pool of potential towers that could be added to the program by determining that those equipped with a monitoring device known as DBRITE (Digital Bright Radar Indicator Tower Equipment) should be considered as having radar capability. This excluded 30 towers from possible conversion to contract operations. However, the IG said DBRITE is not a radar system and is not used in the radar control of air traffic. Further, the IG pointed out that as many as 40 towers in the existing contract tower program have DBRITE displays and provide instrument flight rule (IFR) services through a letter of agreement (LOA) with a larger radar-equipped facility.

A better way to measure the extent to which the program could be expanded would be to take into account factors such as volume of air traffic, types of users and complexity of operations at each location, the IG said. A system of reclassifying FAA towers that was developed in 1998 and establishes ATC Grades 3 through 12 is based on these factors, the IG noted, and use of this grading system on the 71 towers would provide FAA a more comprehensive means for evaluating which facilities to consider. While 15 of FAA's 71 VFR towers are busier than towers in the existing program, the remaining 56 VFR towers have operations that are comparable to towers in the existing program, the IG said.



Second, the IG said that FAA's estimated cost savings for converting more towers to contractor operations were understated because the agency used fiscal year 1998 figures. By fiscal year 1999, the costs to operate FAA towers increased as a result of the new pay system for FAA controllers, the IG said. The annual average savings would actually be closer to \$881,000 per tower instead of the \$787,000 estimated by FAA. Under the IG's calculations, the total savings would be \$62.5 million if all 71 VFR towers are contracted out.

Finally, the IG said that FAA's draft study does not consider important long-term benefits that could accrue from expanding the program. To have credibility, FAA should have given much greater weight to the potential impact that controllers from contracted VFR towers could have in offsetting future increases in system demand and addressing existing staffing shortfalls, the IG said.

FAA projects that aircraft operations at airports with FAA-operated towers will increase by more than 24 percent by 2010. FAA has concluded in its draft that expanding the program wouldn't result in any net savings due to an agreement with the National Air Traffic Controllers Association (NATCA) that establishes a baseline staffing level of 15,000 FAA controllers through 2001. Further, FAA agreed to boost that level by an additional 2 percent each year for the remaining two years of the contract.

While noting that these benefits would be achievable while still maintaining a workforce of 15,000 FAA controllers as specified in the NATCA agreement, the IG underscored the importance of recognizing that terms of the NATCA-FAA agreement are subject to congressional approval. Congress is not bound by the agreement, the IG said, adding that "Congress may exercise its constitutional prerogative by modifying the provisions or the underlying assumptions of the agreement."

Discussions with users of contract towers indicate continued support for the program, the IG said. Based on their experiences with contract operations, these users felt that expanding the program would be feasible. However, the IG pointed out that some users were "strictly opposed" to expanding the program. One airport director said he uses the fact that his tower is an FAA facility as a marketing tool to attract foreign airlines and encourage commercial service.

"It is essential that FAA thoroughly analyze any and all opportunities to offset the rising costs of its operations," the IG report emphasized. "Expanding the contract tower program provides the agency with one such opportunity. FAA should revise its study of expanding the contract tower program to fully recognize the feasibility, costs and benefits that

expanding the program offers."

Spencer Dickerson, AAAE executive vice president and executive director of the U.S. Contract Tower Association, praised the IG's audit and emphasized its residual benefit to smaller communities. "This IG report once again affirms our position that the contract tower program provides safe, high-quality ATC services, receives proper oversight by the FAA and gets high marks from aviation users," he said. "Because of this program, small communities are able to enjoy the important benefits of a control tower when they would otherwise be forced to operate without this safety feature."

Dickerson added that, "We also commend Congress for its bipartisan support of the program, as well as FAA Administrator Jane Garvey and the agency's Air Traffic Office for their efforts to develop this program by working closely with users, airports and ATC contractors to ensure its safety and efficiency."

The IG's full report is available at: <http://www.oig.dot.gov>.

DOT Inspector General Ken Mead told a joint hearing of the Senate Budget Committee and transportation appropriations subcommittee Feb. 3, 2000, that



*DOT Inspector General
Kenneth Mead*

FAA's Contract Tower Program "is a sound program and deserves support."

Following his testimony, Mead was asked by Sen. Richard Shelby (R-Ala.), chairman of the transportation appropriations subcommittee, to comment on

the contract tower program.

"We found that (at) these low-level towers, the program was essentially sound," Mead responded. "We did find that FAA had to stay on top of the contractors to make sure that they came through and made sure that they lived up to their staffing obligations. Safety did not seem to be affect-



*Senator Richard Shelby
(R-Ala.), chairman of the
transportation appropri-
ations subcommittee*

Noting that Congress directed FAA to study whether the contract tower program could be expanded, Mead said “that study was not done properly, in my view. And you turned around and you directed us to do it, in the Inspector General’s Office. And so we are in the process of doing it. One issue that has come up, though, is the controller agreement establishes 15,000 controllers, either as a ceiling or a floor or both, and we were told that, well, if FAA were to contract out any more towers, that is, privatize them, well then, you would be abrogating the controller agreement because some of the controllers would have to come from these towers. But, see, I am not so sure that is a correct analysis, because those controllers could go to some other tower, or they could leave, and FAA could hire some more controllers and put them at the busier facilities, a very controversial issue.”



In an April 2, 2000, interview on AAAE’s Aviation News Today, DOT Inspector General Ken Mead said he is “very encouraged” by FAA’s Contract Tower Program, describing it as “a strong and good program.”

Mead said, “There is no doubt that the towers that have been converted represent cost savings. There is no doubt that some of them are towers that never would have been funded as regular controller towers by the FAA and they have provided service to airports that otherwise would receive none at all.”



AAAE and USCTA applauded an FAA decision not to cut funds earlier in 2000 for 83 FAA contract towers nationwide.

A proposal to eliminate funding for certain contract towers was under consideration as FAA attempted to pinpoint potential savings in light of expected operations budget challenges in the agency’s fiscal year 2000 budget.

“We thank the members of Congress who communicated to FAA the seriousness of this issue,” said Spencer Dickerson, executive vice president of AAAE and executive director of USCTA. “The FAA contract tower program continues to provide important aviation safety benefits as well as significant air traffic control savings as validated by several DOT Inspector General audits. This proposal to cut off funding for contract towers would have adversely

affected aviation safety and penalize a program that is solidly justified from a benefit/cost standpoint,” Dickerson said. He pointed out that USCTA members were “extremely active” in pointing out to their members of Congress the adverse impact on their facilities if contract tower funds were reduced.

Concern over the proposed reduction in funds prompted 23 members of Congress and the entire Wyoming delegation to send separate letters of protest to FAA Administrator Jane Garvey citing the safety and financial benefits of the program.

Although FAA did not formally propose to reduce funding for the contract tower program to solve the agency’s current budget shortfall, the lawmakers expressed concern that the notion of reducing funding for the popular program was even being considered.

In a letter to Garvey signed by the Wyoming delegation, the officials said, “We are very concerned that these control towers are being unfairly targeted because they are considered low priority and have low activity traffic. If these cutbacks are allowed, individual airports will have to assume funding obligations or the towers will be shut down.” The members of Congress pointed out that DOT’s Inspector General has validated the program’s effectiveness in aviation safety, adding that, “This program ultimately affords a great cost saving to several of Wyoming’s airports and maintains the highest element of safety that presently exists at these airports.”



*Rep. Jerry Moran
(R-Kan.)*

Rep. Jerry Moran (R-Kan.) orchestrated the protest letter submitted to Garvey on behalf of the 23 lawmakers. The officials, stating they were “very concerned” over reports that FAA is considering reducing funding for contract towers, noted that while budget difficulties always exist, “FAA has received a funding increase from \$9.8 billion in 1999 to \$9.95 billion in the current fiscal year.

With this budget increase, it is difficult to see the value in a reduction of over 45 percent of the nation’s 186 contract towers.”



*Rep. Ed
Pastor(D-Ariz.)*

Those signing the letter, in addition to Moran, were: Reps. Dave Weldon (R-Fla.), Jack Metcalf (R-Wash.), Ron Kind (D-Wis.), Lois Capps (D-Calif.), Frank Lucas (R-Okla.), Johnny

Isakson (R-Ga.), James Sensenbrenner (R-Wis.), Barbara Cubin (R-Wyo.), Joe Skeen (R-N.M.), John Thune (R-S.D.), Jim Ryun (R-Kan.), Asa Hutchinson (R-Ark.), Jerry Kleczka (D-Wis.), J.C. Watts (R-Okla.), Greg Walden (R-Ore.), Merrill Cook (R-Utah), Wally Herger (R-Calif.), John Doolittle (R-Calif.), Jim DeMint (R-S.C.), John Duncan (R-Tenn.), Ed Pease (R-Ind.) and Billy Tauzin (R-La.).

Three more members of Congress, including Rep. Ed Pastor (D-Ariz.), a member of the House transportation appropriations subcommittee, separately appealed to Garvey not to withdraw federal funding for the contract tower program. Pastor told Garvey that the impact of a funding cutback on Arizona towers would be “draconian” and would paralyze five facilities that rank within the top 20 airports in the country. “At these five airports alone, we currently witness approximately one million aircraft operations annually,” he said. “These are not small-time operations.” Any action that shuts down towers means a loss to the state as private aircraft choose other destinations, Pastor said. “In addition, the state’s unique climate comes into play again by having made it a center for domestic and international aircraft conversions, overhauls and reconditioning. Increasing the difficulty of access, reducing safety considerations, or increasing costs by removing federal controllers will discourage airlines from sending their business to those companies.”

Rep. Virgil Goode (D-Va.) told Garvey that reducing funding to contract towers would create safety concerns that would be detrimental to Virginia.

Rep. Sanford Bishop (D-Ga.) told the administrator that if Southwest Georgia Regional Airport were closed, it would prove a hardship to the city of Albany and to southwest Georgia. “The city is still reeling from two federally declared disasters caused by flooding and would find it impossible to afford the cost of funding any airport cost,” he said.

U.S. Rep. Jerry Costello (D-Ill.) also urged Garvey to withdraw plans to cut funding for the contract tower program. Costello made the comment during Garvey’s testimony before the House transportation appropriations subcommittee on FAA operations for fiscal year 2000, as well its plans for fiscal year 2001 operations.

“I urge you to reverse course and maintain funding for these air traffic control towers, which provide vital service to many communities in Southern Illinois and throughout the state,” Costello said. “We have made a commitment to these airports that the federal government will be their partner, and this



*Rep. Todd Tiahrt
(R-Kan.)*

plan would go back on that commitment.”

Other subcommittee members voicing support for Costello’s position included Charles Bass (R-N.H.), Jerry Moran (R-Kan.) and Don Sherwood (R-Pa.).

Garvey said she agreed with Costello’s assertion and said she was hopeful that FAA would find other ways to achieve savings rather than cut the contract tower program. She also noted she has received letters of concern from airport managers around the country.

Rep. Todd Tiahrt (R-Kan.), during a March 23 House transportation appropriations subcommittee hearing, asked Garvey about the importance of contract towers. Garvey replied that these towers are critical for safety reasons and that FAA will do everything it can to keep them open in the future.



*NTSB Chairman
Jim Hall*

National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigators to date have found “no appreciable difference” in the level of service provided by FAA contract towers versus FAA-staffed towers, board Chairman Jim Hall told delegates at AAEE’s F.

Russell Hoyt National Airports Conference, held Sept. 24-27, 2000, in San Diego.

Hall said NTSB has been paying close attention to any contract-related issues that arise during its investigations “because of the controversies that have surrounded the contract tower program.”

Noting that the program has been substantially expanded since it began in 1994, Hall said it is unclear whether FAA will continue to enlarge the program by converting more federally staffed towers to contract towers. He speculated that, “More could be added as local airport operators participate in the cost-sharing or ‘new-start’ program.” As air traffic in the nation increases and activity at small community airports rises, “We will continued to examine contract tower issues as they arise and will issue recommendations as necessary,” he said.

Over the past few years, the safety board has investigated ATC performance in accidents at four contract-towered airports, Hall said. These were the controlled flight into terrain of Korean Air Flight 801 in Guam and the midair collisions at Meigs Field in Chicago, in Waukegan, Ill., and in Stuart, Fla. Following its investigations, the board concluded

that controller performance did not cause or contribute to either the Korean Air or the Meigs Field accident.

While NTSB continues to investigate the other two accidents, Hall said investigators are looking closely at the tools available to support the controllers, such as radar displays in the tower cabs.

All three midair collisions occurred in or near the traffic pattern of the airports and, without radar, the controllers had to rely on verbal position reports from pilots or controllers in other facilities. "The FAA has identified 87 towered airports that meet its criteria to have displays of radar information available to the controllers, yet installation has not yet been completed," Hall said.

Addressing the problem of runway incursions at the nation's airports, Hall said the industry needs to look for solutions to the problem "at the airport level, not the national level."

Hall said he is encouraged by the "increased focus" on runway incursions at FAA and by FAA's runway incursion summit, but, he said, "There will be no simple solution. It will take a variety of approaches." Technology solutions have been "long on promise" but short on delivery, he said. Many airports already have "low tech, low cost efforts under way," Hall said, and airports need to work to "have a plan in place...to eliminate the problem."

Hall called for "more activity" in the area of preventing runway overruns. He said he is disappointed in FAA actions in this area, particularly the agency's decision to undertake a second survey on runway safety areas, because "I doubt if the new survey will turn up anything new."



Runway incursion numbers continue to increase despite "significant focus" from FAA and the aviation community, DOT Inspector General Ken Mead told the International Aviation Club in September in Washington, D.C.

Records show that runway incursions have increased 60 percent, from 200 in 1994 to 321 in 1999, Mead said. He noted that so far in 2000 there have already been 322 incursions, surpassing the 1999 total. "At this rate," he said, "the number of runway incursions this year will likely surpass 400—the highest ever."



In a Sept. 22, 2000, interview on AAAE's ANTN Aviation News Today, DOT Inspector General Ken Mead supported the expansion of FAA's Contract Tower Program to other VFR towers, saying the program could gain 60-70 more airports.

Describing the contract tower program as "a good, solid program," Mead pointed to its "excellent" track record, adding "especially on the safety front."

Mead acknowledged that the issue of expanding the contract tower program has met "a great deal of resistance" from FAA controllers. He pointed out, however, that FAA faces an employment cap of



15,000 controllers. To live within that cap, Mead said FAA could assign its own controllers to busier facilities while making use of more contract towers, "and I think achieve a savings."

He added, "But I think we've got a good track record with the contract tower program and I think it does bear some room for expansion, at least to VFR facilities."

National Transportation Safety Board Chairman Jim Hall, in a Sept. 8 ANTN interview, said he has been "very pleased" with the growth of the contract tower program and the dedication and professionalism he's seen from the controllers he has personally interviewed.

Hall noted that contract tower operators "need to be aware that any time there is a little something different it attracts public attention." This means that whenever there is an event or an incident at an airport with a contract tower the airport and tower officials "need to be willing to pitch in and assist investigators and allay concerns the public may have out there just because they aren't familiar yet with the words 'contract tower,'" he said.



A FAA-sponsored study projects that runway collisions at U.S. towered airports could kill 700-800 people, as well as injure 200 more in the next 20 years.

The study was authored by Arnold Barnett of MIT and Gary Paull of MCR Federal in Burlington, Ma., and was presented at a convention of the Institute for Operations Research and Management Sciences in San Antonio. Barnett and Paull cautioned that the study's conclusions could be pessimistic because the analysis does not consider the benefits for various alternatives—such as technological innovation—that are aimed at prevent runway collisions.

Recent patterns project roughly 15 fatal runway collisions could occur over the period 2003-2022 at towered U.S. airports, most of them involving at least one jet transport, the authors said. This compares with one fatal accident that killed 11 people between 1997-1999, they said.



FAA Administrator Jane Garvey on Aug. 18, 2000, visited Salina (Kan.) Municipal and Garden City (Kan.) Regional Airports to discuss the agency's contract tower program and participate in discussions on issues that included service to small communities.

Rep. Jerry Moran (R-Kan.) accompanied Garvey on the airport tours, which included the dedication of a new control tower under construction at Garden City. According to Moran, Garvey's visit was to better acquaint her with the infrastructure needs of small and midsized airports in Kansas and highlight some of the progress being made at the Salina and Garden City facilities.

Moran described the meetings in Salina and Garden City as "successful in highlighting the progress these communities have made in improving airport facilities and the importance of these facilities to their respective communities."

Andy Perry, director of aviation at Garden City Regional, said that Garvey's visit permitted airport officials to demonstrate the value of the



Rep. Moran (center) and Administrator Garvey with Dennis Kuhlman, dean of the College of Aviation and Technology at Kansas State University

agency's contract tower and cost-sharing programs.

Garvey's visit included a briefing from city commissioners, the airport board and the chief flight test engineer from Bombardier, who represented an airport user.

Garden City officials also arranged media coverage of Garvey's visit and reporters questioned the administrator on the impact of the Garden City

tower on southwest Kansas. Perry said officials discussed current airport issues with the administrator "and we stressed our thanks for her support for contract towers and the cost-sharing program."

In remarks prepared for delivery, Garvey commented that, "In October, when the controllers at the Garden City airport tower begin clearing flights for takeoff and landing, you in Garden City will have much to be proud of. You will have a new tower, with experienced controllers, that is a participant in the FAA's Contract Tower Program." She noted that, "The Contract Tower Program is a partnership of government and industry that allows our nation's smaller airports the efficiency benefits of an air traffic control facility."

Tim Rogers, A.A.E., executive director of the Salina Airport Authority, said



Tim Rogers, A.A.E., executive director of the Salina (Kan.) Airport Authority (left), Administrator Garvey and Rep. Moran during Garvey's Kansas visit



FAA Administrator Jane Garvey and Rep. Jerry Moran (R-Kan.) at dedication of new control tower at Garden City (Kan.) Regional Airport

Garvey “expressed her pleasure with the progress of the contract tower program and her desire to continue a partnership with FAA, contractors and the U.S. Contract Tower Association.”

Garvey’s visit to Salina included a tour of the airport and airport industrial center, a stop at the site of the new control tower, and a visit to Kansas State Salina Aeronautical Center, where the administrator met with future airline pilots and mechanics.

Rogers said that in addition to receiving a briefing on the benefits to Salina of the contract tower program, Garvey participated in a discussion on small community air service and the concerns of rural FBOs.

According to an article in the *Salina Journal*, John Britting, the owner of Mac Air at McPherson, Kan., Airport, described for Garvey his concerns over increases in FBO insurance rates.

Britting said that two months ago he sold his charter license and six planes “because staying in business just didn’t make good business sense.” The article said Britting noted that the pilot shortage that has many scrambling for pilots and high fuel costs are problems he had come to expect. But when his insurance costs jumped 25 percent, he decided three headaches were just too much.



U.S. District Judge Ann Aldrich in late June 2000 directed FAA to complete a new A-76 cost/benefit analysis concerning the contract air traffic control tower program. The study is to determine whether services should be performed by federal employees or whether they may be contracted out to private parties.



Aldrich said in her decision that FAA “clearly did not comply with the dictates of Circular A-76” and did not provide “a reasoned basis” for its decision. However, Aldrich added that, “NATCA (National Air Traffic Controllers Association) has submitted nothing (nor has the FAA) which definitely establishes

that any kind of air traffic control, let alone the kind in question in this case, is inherently governmental in nature. Indeed, this court can think of good argu-

ments in both directions. NATCA’s entire position, at least the position they chose to re-raise, is that the FAA once declared certain functions to be inherently governmental and that, therefore, they are. Leaving aside the disputed issue of whether or not these were official FAA proclamations, NATCA apparently believes FAA proclamations are the gospel truth when NATCA agrees with them, but have no basis in reality when NATCA disagrees with them. Even if the FAA has taken the position that NATCA claims they have taken (and this court is taking no position on that issue because it is not relevant at this point in time) this court is aware of no law that prevents the FAA from changing its position on whether or not a function is inherently governmental.”

Aldrich’s remand was not expected to have an impact on FAA’s current contract tower program.

NATCA initially challenged the contract tower program in court in 1994.



FAA’s Runway Safety Program Office in the fall issued a list of 10 near-term safety initiatives culled



from the agency’s nationwide summit held in late June 2000.

John Mayrhofer, head of FAA’s runway incursion program, said the list is no longer being called the Top 10 “because these recommendations are just some of many that we will be implementing during the coming months, and I would prefer not to leave an impression that may be misleading by calling something our ‘Top 10.’”

The 10 initiatives identified by Mayrhofer’s office that are judged to have the greatest potential for improving runway safety are: enhanced controller training; foreign air carrier pilot training, education and awareness; an Advisory Circular outlining best practices for airport surface operations; increased visibility of runway markings; education, training and awareness for pilots, controllers and vehicle operators; memory enhancement techniques training for tower controllers; pilot/controller communi-

cations phraseology review; improved pilot evaluation and testing; air traffic teamwork enhancement (ATTE) training for tower controllers, and assessment of emerging technologies that could improve runway safety.

The 10 initiatives were planned to be largely completed by the end of calendar year 2000.

AAAE and USCTA wrote to leading members of the House and Senate transportation committees, requesting that Congress provide full funding for FAA's Terminal Voice Switch Replacement (TVSR) program in fiscal year 2001, which began Oct. 1, 2000.

TVSR is critical to aviation safety and promoting air commerce, the associations pointed out. "Of all the equipment that air traffic controllers use on a daily basis to ensure the safe, orderly and expeditious flow of traffic, voice communications is one of the most important," the letters stressed.

"The Voice Communications System (VCS) fully integrates the air/ground (radio) and ground/ground (intercom, conferencing and telephone) communications between air traffic controllers and pilots, between controllers, between different air traffic control (ATC) facilities and between ATC facilities and emergency response providers such as fire, police and medical personnel.

"Should all other equipment fail, air traffic can still be safely controlled if communications remain operational," the associations stated.

FAA resolved a protest that was lodged by Serco Management Services against the award of five-year contracts to three companies to operate air traffic control towers in the agency's contract tower program.

As a result of the protest, Serco has retained Area 4 (western region). FAA initially awarded that area to Midwest Air Traffic Control Services.

RVA will continue to operate Area 1 (New England and Eastern FAA regions) and Area 2 (Southern and Southwest FAA regions). Midwest ATC will continue to operate Area 3 (Great Lakes and Central FAA regions) and Serco will operate Area 4 (Northwest Mountain and Western Pacific FAA regions), Area 5 (Alaska FAA region) and Area 6 (Hawaii, Guam and Saipan).

A session on contract air traffic control towers was held during AAAE's Annual Conference and Exposition, May 21-24, 2000, in Baltimore.

Speakers at the session were Willie Card, manager of FAA's Contract Tower Program; Tim Rogers, A.A.E., executive director of Salina (Kan.) Airport Authority; Shane Cordes, vice president, Midwest Air Traffic Control Services, and James Hansford, A.A.E., manager at Central Wisconsin Airport.

USCTA held a general membership meeting, as well as a meeting of the organization's Policy Board, during the AAAE conference.

More than 90 airport executives, FAA officials, air traffic control contractor executives and other aviation representatives participated in the Contract Tower Workshop, July 23-25 in Washington, D.C. The annual workshop is sponsored by FAA, AAAE and USCTA.



Among the speakers were Sam Whitehorn, senior democratic counsel of the Senate aviation subcommittee; Jeff Griffith, program director of the air traffic



*Willie Card,
manager, FAA
Contract Tower
Program Office*

operations program at FAA; Willie Card, manager of FAA's Contract Tower Program Office; Richard Wentworth, air traffic resource specialist at the National Transportation Safety Board, and Mike McNally, president of the National Air Traffic Controllers Association.

Topics that were discussed and debated during the three-day meeting included the contract tower cost-sharing program, the benefit/cost ratio used for eligibility in the program, liability insurance, contract tower case studies, the ATC contractors' perspective on the program and contract tower equipment issues.

AAAE and USCTA express appreciation to the following companies for their financial support of the meeting: Midwest Air Traffic Control Services, RVA Inc., Serco Management Services, AJT & Associates, Frequentis USA and CML ATC Technologies.



FAA's Contract Tower Program Office convened a workshop Oct. 30-Nov. 3, 2000, in Washington, D.C., with tower contractors and FAA regional officers to discuss and update elements of the program.

At the invitation of FAA, USCTA's Policy Board and AAAE/USCTA staff participated in a productive, day-long session at the event, with discussion topics that included cost-sharing, equipment issues and insurance.

During the week, FAA and contractors met on fire safety, security, the application process, traffic surveys, the operating agreement, cost-sharing, training requirements and other issues that impact the operation of the program.



Wisconsin Gov. Tommy Thompson presented a certificate to Midwest ATC, recognizing the company "as one of the highest achievers in workplace safety in Wisconsin based upon its outstanding lost-time injury record, awarded January 2000." As part of Wisconsin's Workplace Safety Initiative, employers with no lost-time injuries in the last six years are being recognized for their commitment to safety, Thompson explained.

In other news, Mike Ryan, director at Minot (N.D.) International Airport, recently wrote to Midwest ATC, which operates the Minot tower, to praise the "courteous and professional service rendered by these controllers."

"Since their entry into this aviation community, they have become an integral part of it," Ryan said.



“The excellent comments received from the other aviation interests on this airport have been overwhelming.”

Major Thomas Thibodeau, commander of the 54th Helicopter Flight at Minot, also sent a letter of appreciation to Midwest ATC, saying, “I have never experienced such a continuous high quality of service in my 14 years of aviation service.”

Separately, Midwest ATC was nominated for the Amvets Employer of the Year Award for 1999. Although the company did not win first place, Midwest received a letter from Amvets with a certificate of achievement, which states, in part, “In recognition of your commitment to our nation’s veterans.”



Casey Denny, director of operations at Williams Gateway Airport in Mesa, Ariz., wrote to congratulate Serco Management Services employees for their work in handling air traffic. Serco operates the contract control tower at Williams Gateway.

The contract controllers safely handled over 236,000 operations in 1999, making the facility the busiest tower in the FAA program, Denny said.

A few of the tower’s achievements in 1999 include: 36,000 operations in February; Cox Communications Air Show and the Blue Angels practice show; Experimental Aircraft Association regional fly-in; Boeing/Federal Express MD-10 flight test program, and dealing with a closed runway for most of the year, Denny said.

“And with all that, you still realized how important our Fly Friendly program has become to the noise sensitive areas in the community and met us with a spirit of cooperation,” Denny said. “I certainly appreciate that and hope you and your staff feel a sense of pride and ownership knowing that every day you make our airport better.”



Doug Sandau, manager at Olympia (Wash.) Regional Airport, a contract tower facility, wrote to congratulate Serco Management Services for the efficient work performed by the company’s tower personnel during a June 17-18, 2000, special event.

“The Olympic Flight Museum at Olympia Regional Airport held its second annual ‘War Birds Gathering’ on June 17th and 18th. Actually, the event started gearing up on Friday as numerous aircraft started to





arrive. This event was considered a Fly-In. However, from the amount of people and aircraft that attended, it closely paralleled an Air Show in proportion. There were several WWII and high performance aircraft, as well as general aviation aircraft. The traffic mix of fixed wing and helicopter aircraft performing low approaches and fly-bys with general aviation aircraft arriving for the Fly-In created a complex air traffic scenario to say the least. The total traffic count for Saturday alone was over 1,000 operations! While the scenario became crazy at times, your tower crew handled the air traffic very professionally and safely.

“The Fly-In was in the planning for numerous months prior and included many meetings between all major components of the airport. Mike Macheel, your tower manager, attended each meeting and made critical suggestions that made the event very safe and efficient. Both days of the Fly-In, your tower crew was a major reason the event went over so smoothly and without any glitches! On behalf of the Port of Olympia and Olympia Regional Airport, we wanted to express our thanks for a job well done.”

USCTA on Nov. 29, 2000, hosted staff members from congressional offices, FAA, NTSB, the DOT IG's office, and the State of Virginia at the Charlottesville Albemarle (Va.) Airport, a contract tower facility.

The group also toured Shenandoah Regional Airport in Weyers Cave, Va., which is a non-towered field, and discussed the need for a contract tower.

Air traffic control operational errors have increased sharply in the past five years, rising from 764 in 1996 to 1,154 in 2000, according to a report released by the DOT IG in December 2000 that recommended FAA move swiftly to correct the problem. No contract towers were listed in the IG's report.

The biggest increase in operational errors was reported in the Washington Air Route Traffic Control Center in Leesburg, Va., where errors rose from 24 to 102 during the period. The five centers with high numbers of operational errors, in addition to the Washington center, are Cleveland, New York, Chicago and Indianapolis, the IG said. Operational errors occur when a controller does not ensure that FAA separation standards are maintained between airplanes.

“FAA must approach reducing operational errors with a sense of urgency,” the report stated. “FAA has been ineffective in reducing operational errors, which have increased by 51 percent” since 1996.

An FAA spokesperson said the agency is working to correct the problem in line with the recommendations in the IG's report. Further, FAA in March will complete a system to grade the severity of reported errors, the spokesperson added. One of the IG's complaints was that FAA cannot conclude the extent of the operational error problem because statistics aren't kept on the relative severity of each incident. “While operational errors, which occur mostly in midair, can pose a serious safety risk, the true extend of the safety risk remains unknown because FAA does not determine the severity of every incident,” The IG explained. “For example, the severity of operational errors can vary from an incident that does not pose an immediate safety threat, such as when two airplanes are headed in the same direction with four miles of separation, to an incident that is only seconds away from a head-on collision.”

The IG also pointed to an ongoing dispute between

the National Air Traffic Controllers Association (NATCA) and FAA over just how controllers should be disciplined for operational errors. Further, FAA's regions should prepare and keep current regional error prevention plans and FAA should review these plans on a national level, the IG said.



FAA is inviting airports and airlines to participate in a pilot funding program designed to speed up key airport facility and equipment upgrades.

Under the Pilot Program to Permit Cost Sharing of Air Traffic Modernization Projects, which was authorized in the AIR-21 legislation, the agency will select a maximum of 10 projects designed to improve airport capacity and enhance airspace control procedures. The law permits airports and airport/airline joint ventures in partnership with FAA to procure and install facilities and equipment. Each approved project is limited to receive maximum FAA cost sharing of 33 percent, with no project to exceed \$15 million in federal funds.

Those wishing to participate in the pilot program were to submit applications to FAA by Jan. 19, 2001. A special FAA technical panel will evaluate applications and select eligible projects by July 13, 2001. If 10 projects are not selected, the application procedure will be repeated during 2002 and 2003. Each project must be a validated FAA program and serve the general welfare of the flying public. Specific guidelines for the program were published in the Dec. 6 issue of the Federal Register and can be accessed on the Internet at http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/aces/aces140.html.



The Denro Strategic Business Unit of Litton Advanced Systems, a subsidiary of Litton Industries, has been awarded a contract from the Iberia Parish Airport Authority to provide a Model Small Tower Voice Switch to the Acadiana Regional Airport air traffic control tower, located in New Iberia, La.

Funding for the project has come from the Louisiana DOT. A total of \$160,000 will be available for the complete project, which includes eight new FAA-approved ATC radios.

The Acadiana Regional Airport tower runs 100,000 annual operations and has 43 based aircraft at the field. RVA Inc., with five controllers and one tower chief, operates the tower under FAA contract.



Santa Maria (Calif.) Airport's contract control tower received a perfect score of 100 percent during a bi-annual operations review, according to Gary Rice, A.A.E., general manager of the Santa Maria Public Airport District. "This is an outstanding reflection on our airport and quality of personnel staffing the control tower," Rice noted.

Santa Maria's tower operates seven days a week from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m.



Avweb, an Internet-based aviation publication, released a reader poll in 2000 showing 75 percent of respondents consider the service offered by contract air traffic control towers is “equal to or better than” government-operated towers. A total of 446 persons responded to the publication’s question of the week on contract towers.

Some Avweb aviation users and pilots supplied comments on contract tower operations as well. The following is a sample of those comments:

- “Our local contract tower at Chandler provides incredible service. As a board member of the local chapter of the IAC, I particularly appreciate the degree of cooperation we have experienced when holding our competitions at the airport. The controllers also show great patience with the many students flying out of Chandler. Long may they continue to serve us.”
- “I have used the ATCT at RKDM Redmond, Ore., and find that the controllers are great to work with. They have always given 110 percent service!”
- “With our contract tower, I know everybody up there. As a fulltime CFI at a college, it is nice to have people who are so friendly, and who I can take my students up to meet with no advance warning. I see no reason at all to either eliminate or re-staff with much more expensive FAA types.”
- “Contract towers employ a large number of career



ATC retirees, thereby providing a well-experienced productive controller. Unlike many of today’s new hire controllers, most of these folks are pilots who have a greater understanding of a pilot’s airborne needs.”

- “Last March I flew into Bozeman, Mont., which has a contract tower. I found them to be very efficient, friendly and capable. On the same flight, I flew past Helena, which has a government tower. They were friendly and efficient, too. However, by comparison, their attitude was stiff and not as warm as the contract tower.”
- “We are very pleased with the level of service provided by the contract tower folks at Anoka County-Blaine Airport. The rapport that the controllers have established with the users is excellent, and the users appreciate the ATC presence on the field.”
- “The contract tower program enhances aviation safety by providing high-quality ATC services at smaller airports. It’s a great move for the taxpayer, and a great move for pilots and the traveling public. I have flown into several contract tower airports and have always found the skill and service to be top notch and a friendlier, more cooperative controller. The contract tower program has definitely proven itself effective.”
- “FTY Fulton County, Ga., has had a contract tower for several years and they do an excellent job. The

big difference that I see as a pilot is that they are now open 24/7 and that makes it very handy for late night arrivals. The service is very good.”

- “I routinely fly into the Hutchinson Municipal Airport (HUT), which has contract tower personnel. Most of the controllers are retired Air Force controllers and do an excellent job. Their main challenge, which they freely admit, is getting used to the different GA models. But you have to remember, these folks are used to dealing with everything from



fast movers to C-5s. All things considered, I think the HUT controllers are even a little friendlier than the government controllers I’ve dealt with. And I’ve got no complaints about the government controllers.”

- “We have two contract towers and two FAA-staffed

towers at four of our airports. The controllers at the two contract towers at Whiteman Airport and Fox are certainly as qualified as the FAA controllers, but their helpful and courteous attitude is the big difference. For example, during some recent construction projects, the FAA controllers acted more like it was their airport and if they didn’t get their way, they were going to tell the union. We even had tower managers tell us that they would have to check with the union before they could make a decision. At the other two airports, the contract controllers really work with airport management and the users to allow a much smoother operation and in all cases, a safe airport environment.”

- “Last year I had occasion to fly in the Lynchburg, Va., airspace and was controlled by the contract controllers at the facility. They were extremely professional and followed all of the published procedures. After landing, I visited the tower and found that all of the controllers were either retired from the FAA or ex-military controllers.”

- “I fly regularly from Martinsburg, W. Va., airport, which uses a parttime contract tower. These controllers are among the friendliest and most helpful human beings on the planet. My hat is off to Del and the staff of this often overworked, low-volume international airport!”

- “Contract tower controllers tend to be friendlier and just plain helpful while doing their main job of keeping planes and pilots dent-free. In noise abatement areas, they are more helpful in maintaining peace with the community. Two excellent contract towers are San Carlos and Santa Maria, Calif.”

- “The tower at Eagle County (EGE) is one such contract tower that clearly is above the rest in customer service. They go out of their way to accommodate both GA and commercial traffic at this busy mountain airport.”

- “As an airfield operations chief at a facility that has had a contract tower for approximately eight years, I must whole-heartedly endorse the contract tower program as one that would indeed save the FAA untold numbers of dollars while, at the same time, providing airports with an equivalent, if not better level of service than FAA towers. The sense of cooperation and partnership manifested by contract tower companies and airport management is invaluable in the day-to-day operational tasks and challenges confronting smaller to medium-sized airports.”

- “We have a contract tower at LYH. The controllers are great! Mostly retired FAA controllers and supervisors who now come to work everyday to “work traffic,” not to endure government politics. The level of service at LYH has improved tenfold, especially the attitude and courtesy extended to pilots. These con-

trollers are especially patient with student pilots and help them in every way to enjoy the learning experience. Sure, I have had very good service at many FAA towers, but the service and attitude at LYH now as a contract tower is a cut above.”

- “Controllers are often the first people that speak to an inbound aircraft. His/her attitude and expertise are a reflection not only of the airport, but also the whole city and/or region. Based on the fact that contract controllers meet or exceed all FAA requirements for ATC, the towers are run much more efficiently, and their attitudes are much better, there is no doubt in my mind that contract controllers are an asset to Level I towers.”

- “The services I received from contract tower personnel are remarkable. They are very friendly, helpful and knowledgeable. It’s always a pleasure doing business with them. Great program! Keep it going!”

- “I use the contract tower at Dothan, Ala., (DHN). I work in a very high IFR training environment. The tower at DHN gives me some of the best service in a high volume IFR training environment that I have experienced on three continents.”

- “I use several airports in Central California, including my home base in Salinas (SNS). I believe their attitude is very good. Even though we have experienced a great deal of turnover of tower personnel, I recall that when Salinas was an FAA tower, it was used as a training facility for newly minted controllers. Local pilot organizations have made the controllers welcome by including them in local programs and local area orientation flights. I appreciate the service provided by contract towers. Thanks.”

- “Attitude seems to be the biggest difference. Contract controllers seem to be more courteous and helpful. I suspect it has something to do with job security. Having flown an average of 250 hours annually for the past five years throughout the Northwest, I have noticed a distinct difference. Every time I read the FAA is considering relapsing to full FAA control towers, I shudder.”

- “The Smyrna, Tenn., control tower is a contract tower. I have been flying in and out of the airport frequently over the last four years. The tower folks are great to work with! They handle pros and students with equal ease. If they are an example of non-federal control towers, I don’t see any problems.”

- “The controllers at the Chandler, Ariz., contract tower are very helpful. Although I am not a student pilot, there are many student pilots that learn there, including many foreign pilots. Once when I was monitoring the frequency, a foreign pilot unfamiliar with the area called in saying he was SW, but used a landmark that was NE. If he really was NE, he would have been in a busy traffic area for three other airports. The controller took the time to help find other land-

marks nearby to distinguish his location and did it in a manner that was calm and helpful. This level of professionalism gets my vote any day!”

- “Hutchinson tower was converted to a contract tower in 1996, even though the FAA manager at the time believed the traffic county (39,000 operations) indicated closure rather than contracting. Since then, our traffic count has increased annually to over 70,000 operations in 1999. In addition, the initial cadre of contract controllers had over 80 years total combined experience in ATC. The comments received from our pilot customers (a great majority from the aircraft manufacturers in Wichita) reflect the positive attitudes while focusing on the safe, expeditious movement of air traffic. The contract controllers here have made the effort to meet their customers, explain procedures to student pilots, and are an integral part of both the local and aviation community.”

- “I fly out of Nashua, N.H., contract tower and that control tower is top notch. I fly all over the East Coast and most towers are pretty good. If I didn’t know that Nashua was a contract tower, I probably wouldn’t know the difference.”

- “Since I am a new private pilot attempting to build hours toward more ratings, I have been doing a lot of flying lately to different towered airports. I have noticed that the ability to deal with controllers seems more related to the work load at the moment than with who is signing their paycheck. I used two contract towers this weekend, Hawthorne, Calif., and Chandler, Ariz. I always receive excellent and safe service at HHR and received friendly and helpful service at CHD.”

- “I am the airport manager at Greenbrier Valley Airport in Lewisburg, W. Va. I also manage the tower contract. Our tower is vital to the intensive jet operations that occur several months per year. The reduced cost to FAA of a contract tower has been the difference between having a tower at this airport or not. I routinely receive compliments about the quality of service provided by our controllers who also achieve near perfect scores on their annual FAA evaluations. I see the contract tower program as a success in that more towers will be in operation at smaller airports, increasing the overall level of safety throughout the system.”

- “We are in our fourth year of operations with a contract tower service. Midwest Air Traffic Control is our service provider and we could not be happier with the results. Our tower is funded by four companies with their own aircraft based here at Muncie/Delaware County airport in Muncie, Ind. Cooperation, service and attention to detail could not be better. All of our controllers are retired FAA or military and safety is their number one concern.”

Participants in FAA's Contract Tower Program

as of January 1, 2001 (199 towers)

AIRPORT NAME	FAA REGION	STATE	AIRPORT NAME	FAA REGION	STATE
Bethel	AAL	AK	Burke Lakefront	AGL	OH
Kenai Municipal	AAL	AK	Ohio State University	AGL	OH
King Salmon	AAL	AK	Cincinnati Mun./Lunken	AGL	OH
Kodiak	AAL	AK	Cuyahoga County	AGL	OH
			Rapid City Regional	AGL	SD
Dubuque	ACE	IA	Appleton	AGL	WI
Forbes Field	ACE	KS	Central Wisconsin	AGL	WI
Garden City	ACE	KS	Kenosha Municipal	AGL	WI
Hutchinson Mun.	ACE	KS	Lacrosse	AGL	WI
Johnson Co. Exec.	ACE	KS	Rock County	AGL	WI
Philip Billard Mun.	ACE	KS	Timmerman (Milwaukee)	AGL	WI
New Century Air Center	ACE	KS	Waukesha County Airport	AGL	WI
Salina Municipal	ACE	KS	Wittman Regional	AGL	WI
Columbia	ACE	MO			
Joplin Regional	ACE	MO	Bridgeport	ANE	CT
Rosecrans Mem'l/St. Joseph	ACE	MO	Danbury	ANE	CT
Central Neb./Grand Island	ACE	NE	Groton-New London	ANE	CT
			Hartford-Brainard	ANE	CT
Martin State	AEA	MD	Tweed-New Haven	ANE	CT
Washington Co. Reg'l/Hagerstown	AEA	MD	Barnes Municipal	ANE	MA
Salisbury-Wicomico	AEA	MD	Beverly	ANE	MA
Trenton	AEA	NJ	Hyannis	ANE	MA
Tompkins County	AEA	NY	Lawrence	ANE	MA
Niagara Falls	AEA	NY	Martha's Vineyard	ANE	MA
Oneida County	AEA	NY	New Bedford	ANE	MA
Stewart	AEA	NY	Norwood	ANE	MA
Capital City	AEA	PA	Worcester	ANE	MA
Lancaster	AEA	PA	Boire Field/Nashua	ANE	NH
Williamsport/Lycoming Co.	AEA	PA	Lebanon Municipal	ANE	NH
Charlottesville-Albemarle	AEA	VA			
Lynchburg	AEA	VA	Eagle County	ANM	CO
Greenbrier Valley	AEA	WV	Grand Junction	ANM	CO
Morgantown	AEA	WV	Friedman Memorial	ANM	ID
Parkersburg	AEA	WV	Idaho Falls	ANM	ID
Wheeling Ohio Co.	AEA	WV	Lewiston-Nez Perce Co.	ANM	ID
			Pocatello Municipal	ANM	ID
Bloomington/Normal	AGL	IL	Gallatin Field/Bozeman	ANM	MT
Decatur	AGL	IL	Missoula International	ANM	MT
Meigs Field (Chicago)	AGL	IL	Klamath Falls	ANM	OR
St. Louis Regional	AGL	IL	McNary Field	ANM	OR
So. Illinois/Carbondale	AGL	IL	Medford	ANM	OR
Waukegan Regional	AGL	IL	Pendleton Municipal	ANM	OR
Williamson County	AGL	IL	Redmond	ANM	OR
Gary Regional	AGL	IN	Troutdale (Portland)	ANM	OR
Muncie/Delaware County	AGL	IN	Ogden-Hinckley Mun.	ANM	UT
Battle Creek	AGL	MI	Bellingham Int'l	ANM	WA
Detroit City	AGL	MI	Felts Field (Spokane)	ANM	WA
Jackson	AGL	MI	Olympia	ANM	WA
Anoka (Minneapolis)	AGL	MN	Renton	ANM	WA
Minot	AGL	ND	Tacoma Narrows	ANM	WA
Bolton Field (Columbus)	AGL	OH	Walla Walla Regional	ANM	WA

AIRPORT NAME	FAA REGION	STATE	AIRPORT NAME	FAA REGION	STATE
Yakima	ANM	WA	Houma	ASW	LA
Cheyenne	ANM	WY	Alexandria	ASW	LA
Jackson Hole	ANM	WY	Shreveport Downtown	ASW	LA
			Farmington Municipal	ASW	NM
Dothan	ASO	AL	Lea County/Hobbs	ASW	NM
Brookley (Mobile)	ASO	AL	Santa Fe Co. Mun.	ASW	NM
Tuscaloosa Municipal	ASO	AL	Ardmore Municipal	ASW	OK
Albert Whitted	ASO	FL	Enid Woodring Mun.	ASW	OK
Boca Raton	ASO	FL	Lawton Municipal	ASW	OK
Gainesville	ASO	FL	Univ. of Oklahoma/Westheimer	ASW	OK
Hollywood	ASO	FL	Wiley Post	ASW	OK
Craig (Jacksonville)	ASO	FL	Brownsville Int'l	ASW	TX
Key West	ASO	FL	Easterwood	ASW	TX
Kissimmee	ASO	FL	Grand Prairie	ASW	TX
Lakeland Municipal	ASO	FL	Laredo International	ASW	TX
Melbourne	ASO	FL	McAllen	ASW	TX
Naples	ASO	FL	McKinney Municipal	ASW	TX
Opa Locka	ASO	FL	Redbird	ASW	TX
Page Field	ASO	FL	Rio Grande Valley International	ASW	TX
Panama City/Bay Co.	ASO	FL	San Angelo	ASW	TX
Pompano Beach	ASO	FL	Stinson Municipal (San Antonio)	ASW	TX
Stuart/Whitham	ASO	FL	Tyler	ASW	TX
Titusville/Cocoa	ASO	FL			
Athens Municipal	ASO	GA	Chandler	AWP	AZ
Fulton County	ASO	GA	Flagstaff Pulliam	AWP	AZ
Gwinnett County	ASO	GA	Glendale	AWP	AZ
Macon	ASO	GA	Goodyear (Phoenix)	AWP	AZ
McCollum Cobb County	ASO	GA	Laughlin/Bullhead City	AWP	AZ
SW Georgia/Albany-Dougherty	ASO	GA	Mesa/Williams Gateway	AWP	AZ
Valdosta Municipal	ASO	GA	Ryan (Tucson)	AWP	AZ
Barkley Regional	ASO	KY	Chico	AWP	CA
Owensboro/Daviess Co.	ASO	KY	Fullerton	AWP	CA
Greenville Municipal	ASO	MS	Hawthorne	AWP	CA
Hawkins Field	ASO	MS	Mather	AWP	CA
Meridian/Key Field	ASO	MS	Modesto	AWP	CA
Tupelo Regional	ASO	MS	Oxnard	AWP	CA
Kingston	ASO	NC	Palmdale	AWP	CA
New Bern	ASO	NC	Redding Municipal	AWP	CA
Smith Reynolds	ASO	NC	Riverside	AWP	CA
Hickory Regional	ASO	NC	Sacramento Executive	AWP	CA
Isla Grande, Puerto Rico	ASO	P.R.	Salinas Municipal	AWP	CA
Grand Strand/Myrtle Beach	ASO	SC	San Carlos	AWP	CA
Greenville Downtown	ASO	SC	Brown Field (San Diego)	AWP	CA
Smyrna	ASO	TN	San Luis Obispo	AWP	CA
McKeller-Sipes	ASO	TN	Santa Maria	AWP	CA
Alexander Hamilton (St. Croix)	ASO	Virgin Islands	Whiteman	AWP	CA
			William J. Fox	AWP	CA
			Agana	AWP	Guam
Fayetteville	ASW	AR	Kona/Keahole	AWP	HI
Northwest Arkansas Regional	ASW	AR	Lihue	AWP	HI
Springdale	ASW	AR	Molokai	AWP	HI
Texarkana Mun./Webb Field	ASW	AR	Elko	AWP	NV
Acadiana Regional	ASW	LA	Saipan International	AWP	MP

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