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U.S. Department
of Transportation

**Federal Aviation
Administration**

Office of the Administrator

800 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20591

JAN 1 8 2008

The Honorable Sam Graves
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Graves:

As we begin the New Year, I thought it appropriate to update you on the status of our hiring and training of air traffic controllers.

A little more than two decades ago, following a period of labor unrest, an overwhelming majority of the air traffic control workforce went on strike. President Reagan ordered those controllers to return to duty within 48 hours. When over 10,000 striking controllers did not return to work, President Reagan terminated them, leaving approximately 4,700 controllers on duty. Thereafter, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) hired over 5,600 controllers in 1982 and another 3,000 in 1983. From 1982 through 1991, the agency hired an average of 2,655 controllers per year. This hiring wave created the potential for a large portion of the controller workforce to reach retirement age at roughly the same time. We are currently at that point. Beginning in Fiscal Year (FY) 2005, we began to see an increase in retirements of our air traffic controller workforce.

The FAA began to plan for this retirement wave in 2002. The FY 2004 President's Budget included our first request to address the need for additional controllers above and beyond normal attrition. The hiring plans to meet the retirement "bubble" were included in every budget request since FY 2004. The actual new hires by year continue to increase:

FY 2005	438
FY 2006	1,116
FY 2007	1,815
FY 2008	1,877

In FY 2004, the FAA issued its first Controller Workforce Plan (CWP), outlining a comprehensive plan for hiring and training air traffic controllers over the next decade. The plan is updated annually to reflect the dynamic nature of this hiring initiative. Today, the FAA employs close to 15,000 air traffic controllers. Over the next decade, approximately 62 percent of this workforce will become eligible to retire.

In FY 2007, the FAA hired 1,815 controllers and ended the year with 14,874 controllers, 67 above its target of 14,807. For FY 2008, we currently plan to hire over 1,877 controllers which would bring the total to 15,130, a net gain of 256 controllers over the FY 2007 on board staffing level.

Our new hires largely come from three sources: experienced military controllers, Collegiate Training Initiative (CTI) partner schools, and the general public. We recently took action in all three areas to greatly increase our qualified applicant pool. For previous military controllers, we now offer a recruitment bonus of $20,000 and have attracted a significant increase in the number of high quality candidates. We completed a revised CTI evaluation process this summer and added nine new schools to the existing 14, which will add large numbers of these high quality candidates with college degrees. Finally, we completed various state-by-state public sector job announcements across the country and received over 25,000 applications. We are currently testing those applicants and plan another round of nationwide announcements in 2008.

One major goal of the CWP is to reduce training time for controllers to achieve full certification. Prior to recent improvements in the training process, typical training time to reach full certification was five to six years. Through streamlining of the process and the introduction of new technology, such as simulation, we are seeing improvements in training time. Reducing training time and failure rates are key elements for success in meeting the CWP staffing levels.

The replacement of our retiring controller workforce is a multiyear challenge. Over the last four years, retirements have been slightly higher than projected. However, we are making progress in hiring and training controllers and have been able to adjust our hiring to meet the goals of the CWP. The vast majority of our facilities fall within the authorized staffing range included in our annual CWP. We are focusing on approximately two dozen terminal facilities where overtime use is abnormally high and/or six-day workweeks are in effect for some portion of the controller workforce. In the vast majority of cases, the controllers are volunteering for overtime and additional work days. The issue involves mainly our small facilities where the unexpected loss of several controllers has a significant impact, but there are a few larger ones like the Atlanta Terminal Radar Approach Control (TRACON) where we are focusing specific hiring efforts. For example, we used targeted job announcements this year to hire additional controllers at Atlanta and several other critical facilities. The focus facilities will vary over time as developmental controllers become certified and as other retirements take place.

With respect to attrition, we expect it to continue at a similar pace over the next two to three years. After that, we expect the trend to begin to decline. These next few years are critical, and we are prepared to take additional steps to ensure we meet the staffing targets in our CWP. We are looking at a number of options, including retention bonuses for retirement eligible controllers at some of our critical facilities. We will continue to push hard on training during this transition period and stay focused on improvements in curriculum and technology.

While we are focused on the hiring and training of new controllers, it is important to point to the broader measures that are trending positively. Over the past two years, we met our targets for both operational errors and serious runway incursions by developing strategies to address risks in the aviation system. From the productivity perspective, controller time on position system-wide is running about four hours and 47 minutes for an eight-hour workday. While some individual facilities may be higher, total system overtime is at 1.8 percent, which is considered low. And total operations per controller are roughly the same as 1999 and 2000.

As we work through the multiyear challenges of replacing the controller workforce, we look forward to working with Congress on the following issues:

Facility Realignment

The FAA has over 400 terminal facilities where we manage air traffic at the lower altitudes around airports. Originally, radar and automation limitations drove the requirement for a large number of terminal facilities. However, today's technology is capable of supporting lower facility infrastructure requirements. There have been many plans over the years relating to facility realignment. Facility realignment can include transfers of radar functions from small facilities to larger ones during midnight shift or low activity hours, decombining or "splitting" radar and tower positions at some of our terminal facilities, co-location, and consolidation of facilities. The purpose of these plans is not solely to reduce costs. Facility realignment improves safety and efficiency, but also enables the FAA to modernize more quickly, thus providing air traffic controllers and technicians a better working environment and more up-to-date technology. Moreover, realignment helps the FAA to better staff its facilities.

The FAA has consolidated many facilities successfully. For example, consolidated facilities in New York, Washington, Atlanta and southern California handle traffic for entire metropolitan areas or regions, respectively. As we build new towers, we are examining our facilities on a case-by-case basis to determine whether consolidation or collocation is warranted. We are also examining ways to reduce the impact of facility realignments on our workforce. If the FAA is unable to modernize and draw down our excess and aging infrastructure, our long-term viability is in jeopardy. Further, our ability to respond to changes in air traffic and adjust staffing levels during this critical period will become more difficult.

Training

As part of our comprehensive hiring plan, one of our goals is to reduce training time for controllers to achieve full certification. Through streamlining the training process and the introduction of new technology, such as simulation, we are seeing improvements in training time.

For example, we are installing 24 tower cab simulators at various facilities across the country and at the FAA Academy. This will modernize and increase training capacity at these facilities. And, we have added the En Route Training Simulation System (ERTSS) at the FAA Academy and plan to expand this technology to more facilities. ERTSS will add increased training capacity for new hires and controllers in training. Other training and development initiatives will focus on reducing training time for controllers.

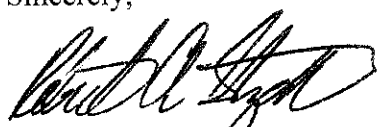
We recognize the need to do more, and we look forward to working with you to revamp our training systems to accommodate technology and modern training methodologies.

Funding

Finally, the system by which FAA is funded continues to hang in the balance. Short-term extensions and continuing resolutions present great challenges to funding airport improvement projects and replacing the controller workforce. The current funding scheme also inhibits our ability to efficiently implement the Next Generation Air Transportation System (NextGen). We look forward to working with you in 2008 to provide a sustainable and predictable funding stream. The cost-based financing proposal submitted by the Administration in February 2007 achieved these goals in an equitable manner. Furthermore, this proposal would reduce congestion by encouraging more efficient use of the National Airspace System.

I hope you find this update useful, and I look forward to working with you on these and other challenges facing the FAA. If you have further concerns or questions, please contact me or Ms. Megan Rosia, Assistant Administrator for Government and Industry Affairs, at 202-267-3277.

Sincerely,



Robert A. Sturgell
Acting Administrator