

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 14, 2015

The Honorable Michael Huerta
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
U.S. Department of Transportation
800 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Administrator Huerta,

There are more than 30 air traffic control towers throughout the country waiting on the Federal Aviation Administration to complete the Benefit-Cost Analysis (BCA) for the Federal Contract Tower Program. We write to highlight one airport in our state, the Hammond Northshore Regional Airport (KHDC) in Hammond, Louisiana, and the significant delays it continues to face regarding its acceptance into the FCT Program.

This tower was funded, constructed, and manned through a partnership between the City of Hammond, the National Guard Bureau, the Louisiana Army National Guard (LANG), and in accordance with the FAA. KHDC's application into the FCT Program was submitted in 2012, yet it remains unprocessed, waiting for the FAA to decide how to calculate the new BCA. Meanwhile, the City and the LANG have continued operating the tower, which sees an average of 8,000 flight operations per month. Many of these flights are conducted by the National Guard and Department of Homeland Security aviation units in order to support vital national defense, law enforcement, and humanitarian relief missions. The Hammond tower has steadily become a critical regional and national asset, serving as a staging area during natural and manmade disasters.

The tower originally opened in December 2014 and commenced Class D operations in March 2015, which completed a planning, funding, and construction effort that began in 2008 and involved detailed coordination between the City of Hammond, the LANG, and the FAA as described in the attached timeline. KHDC now boasts the longest runways and most room for expansion in the 120-mile stretch between Baton Rouge Metropolitan Airport and Stennis International Airport in Bay St. Louis, MS. Positioned in a relatively storm-resistant area just across Lake Pontchartrain from New Orleans, KHDC is also in a region comprising three of the four fastest growing parishes in the state. This location, along with the new tower, has exponentially increased KHDC's flight operations.

Attachment 1 shows the 2015 flight operations. Almost immediately after opening, operations increased to between 3,000 and 4,000 flights per month. April and May 2015 included over 25 days of instrument flight rule-only weather in two months; however, once the weather improved, operations began averaging near 8,000 per month for the last four months. Note that current manning levels limit the tower to ten hours per day (0800 – 1800) seven days a week. Operations outside of these hours, which visual observation indicates are significant, are not tracked and are not included in the attached figures.

The LANG currently mans the tower and is pressing forward with a Certified Tower Operator (CTO) training program that will train two people each quarter for a total of eight CTOs each year experienced in flight data, ground control, and local control. The current CTOs manning the tower and those in training would benefit tremendously from equipment, such as a radarscope, that comes from participating in the FCT Program.

As you know, the FAA has not conducted regular contract tower BCA ratios on current contract towers and those non-towered airports and non-federal towers interested in getting into the program since 2010. In addition, the FAA announced further delays when it informed Congress in April 2014 that there would be a complete moratorium until December 2015. Despite previous reassurance, it has been brought to our attention, that the FAA will delay completing the BCA ratios until March 2017 at a minimum. These continued delays are unacceptable, and we request that you reconsider this most recent delay and immediately calculate BCA's for all pending applications using existing methodologies.

Given the unique partnerships forged at the KHDC tower, the benefits of a training program, the significant number of flight operations, and the regional and national importance of the airport, we request that the FAA accept the KHDC tower into the FCT Program based on these criteria. Thank you for your time and consideration of this of matter of great importance to the people of Louisiana.

Sincerely,



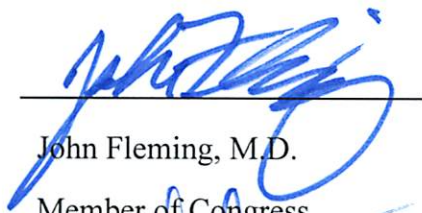
Bill Cassidy, M.D.

United States Senator



Steve Scalise

Member of Congress



John Fleming, M.D.

Member of Congress



Garret Graves

Member of Congress



David Vitter

United States Senator



Charles W. Boustany, Jr., M.D.

Member of Congress



Ralph Abraham, M.D.

Member of Congress



Cedric Richmond

Member of Congress

Attachments (3):

1. KHDC Operations Tracker, January - August 2015.
2. Detailed KHDC Tower Timeline.
3. KHDC Benefit/Cost Analysis, November 2014.

Cc: Mr. Ignacio Flores, Manager, FAA Office of Airports, Southwest Region