



U.S. Department
of Transportation

**Federal Aviation
Administration**

Office of the Administrator

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

APR 9 2008

The Honorable Ted Poe
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Poe:

Thank you for your February 25 and April 4 letters about the upcoming transition of limited approach control services from Southeast Texas Regional Airport to Houston. I apologize for the delay, but we wanted to conduct a thorough review before responding in writing.

As you requested, I give you my commitment that the Federal Aviation Administration won't contract out or cost share the air traffic services at the airport for five years.

We do understand your constituents' concerns and have gained valuable insight from the meetings you recommended. As you know, we participated in the August 7 public meeting you hosted in Port Arthur. We also met with Southeast Texas air traffic controllers on February 15, with the Jefferson County Commissioners Court on February 15, with pilots on March 11, and with representatives from the Chambers of Commerce of Beaumont, Port Arthur, and Orange on March 12. At your request, we also provided responses to the questions submitted at the public meeting. The input we've received from these meetings has been factored into our relocation plans.

Because of the lead time required for Federal construction projects, this transition has been discussed for over a decade. In 2004, the FAA completed the construction of a \$12 million Airport Traffic Control Tower, without room for approach control services since those services would be provided remotely from Houston. In 2007, the FAA installed a \$9 million digital, state-of-the-art Airport Surveillance Radar, Model 11 at Southeast Texas Regional Airport. With the new tower and new radar in place, we plan to complete the relocation of the approach control services on April 10.

After the transition, we believe that pilots will see an improvement in services. For instance, we will provide terminal approach control service 24 hours per day, so air traffic controllers will be able to see aircraft at lower altitudes at night. Currently, we transfer approach services to the Houston Air Route Traffic Control Center at night using radar that cannot see as low to the ground. Radar coverage will also improve in areas such as those near Galveston. We will continue to provide services to smaller planes flying under visual flight rules (VFR), including

VFR flight following. We will also continue to provide full practice approach services, including Airport Surveillance Radar approaches. We will monitor the demand for the Airport Surveillance Radar approach services to determine if there is a long-term need to continue to provide them.

Although we do not plan to hold additional public meetings before the April 10 transition, we will hold a public meeting after the transition takes place. Once the pilots have experience with the new configuration, we can get feedback and address any concerns that they have after using the system.

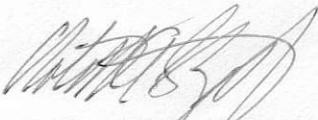
At the March 11 meeting with pilots, we provided detailed information on how the service will be provided and which frequencies to use beginning on April 10. We provided pilots with phone numbers to call in case they experience any problems during the transition.

Your letter also mentioned a fatal accident that occurred after the FAA transferred Palm Springs airspace to the consolidated Southern California Terminal Radar Approach Control facility. Please understand that we take safety very seriously and would never compromise our air traffic services. There is no evidence to suggest that the transfer was in any way responsible for this accident.

Finally, I want to assure you that we will closely monitor the upcoming transition of air traffic services and will provide you with regular operational updates during the first 180 days. In addition, we will not remove any equipment from Southeast Texas Regional for 180 days.

If I can be of further help, please contact me or Ms. Megan Rosia, Assistant Administrator for Government and Industry Affairs, at (202) 267-3277.

Sincerely,



Robert A. Sturgell
Acting Administrator