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May 10, 2012

Ms. Melinda George  
Support Specialist  
Eastern Service Center  
Operations Support Group AJV-E2  
Non Rule Case No. 12-AEA-105-NR  
PO Box 20636  
Atlanta, GA 30320

Re: Aeronautical Study 12-AEA-105-NR, Proposal to Decommission the Kessel Very High Frequency Omnidirectional Range (VOR), Kessel, WV.

Ms. George,

The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA), representing more than 400,000 members nationwide, submits the following comments in response to the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) proposed decommissioning of the Kessel (ESL) Very High Frequency Omnidirectional Range (VOR) with distance measuring equipment (DME) facility in Kessel, WV. AOPA opposes this decommissioning due to the substantial impact on general aviation operations through loss of all-weather access to airports utilizing the ESL VOR/DME, and the lack of suitable alternative facilities and procedures.

The Kessel VOR with DME is used for numerous enroute and terminal navigation functions, including four Victor airways, two Jet airways, holding patterns, and multiple instrument approach procedures (IAPs). The loss of navigation infrastructure caused by this decommissioning would degrade the all-weather access and availability of instrument flight rules options in the enroute environment as well as to numerous airports. The Greater Cumberland Regional Airport (KCBE) in conjunction with the FAA is investing approximately \$58 million dollars in airport improvements while at the same time potentially losing critical ground infrastructure that would diminish the usefulness of those improvements. In addition, the loss of the Remote Communications Outlet (RCO) at CBE associated with the ESL VOR/DME would eliminate a critical mechanism for general aviation traffic to obtain instrument flight rules (IFR) clearances and communicate while on the ground, thus having a negative impact on safety. The impact on IAPs at Grant County, Petersburg, WV (W99) is also extremely concerning as every IAP would be impacted by the decommissioning of ESL VOR with DME.

It is also not reasonable to decommission navigation aids and replace some of the associated fixes (e.g. KEYER intersection) with global positioning system (GPS) waypoints for airports that are served primarily by ground-based navaids. For example, if the only existing approach procedures at an airport are ground based, those aircraft based there are not likely to be equipped with IFR GPS capability. In general, the replacement of ESL VOR with a GPS waypoint would work for some of the procedures that utilize the navaid, but not all.

Of significant concern is the fact that this proposed decommissioning is due to the construction of 54 wind turbines on the mountains surrounding the VOR. AOPA is extremely concerned that the government is not protecting the national airspace system and its infrastructure by issuing a hazard determination when wind turbines impact navigation aids and operations in the national airspace. Instead we are sacrificing critical safety of flight infrastructure and operations rather than requiring mitigation by the turbine proponent so that no impacts to the airspace system result. AOPA strongly suggests the FAA require that the wind turbine proponent in this case fund the upgrade to dopolarize the VOR and ensure proper mitigation without an impact to the operating community and without additional expense to the public.

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AOPA supports the navigation transition from ground based to a satellite based system. However, that transition to a performance based navigation system must occur without a loss of safety and access to our nation's airports and airway system. The magnitude of impact caused by this decommissioning would substantially degrade the efficiency, safety, and availability of navigation procedures in the region. While we appreciate the FAA's effort to reduce expenses, general aviation cannot afford to lose critical, all-weather, enroute, and terminal access. AOPA requests that the FAA withdraw its proposal to decommission the ESL VOR.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our comments on this proposed decommissioning.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Kramer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "T".

Tom Kramer  
Manager, Airspace and Modernization