

# United States Senate

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April 27, 2007

Honorable Marion C. Blakey  
Administrator  
Federal Aviation Administration  
800 Independence Ave., SW  
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Administrator Blakey:

I write in light of the recent public safety concerns raised as a result of the FAA's plan to consolidate the Palm Springs Terminal Radar Approach Control (TRACON) into the Southern California TRACON.

I request that the FAA take immediate action to delay this highly controversial consolidation until there is a much more robust public debate and more answers provided by your agency.

I also believe the FAA should delay the Palm Springs consolidation so that Congress can have the opportunity to evaluate your agency's approach during the upcoming consideration of FAA reauthorization legislation this year.

As I am sure you are aware, the Senate Commerce Committee, on which I serve, plans to mark up FAA reauthorization legislation in May and both the Administration and key Members of Congress have proposals on new ways to evaluate and proceed with FAA consolidations of services and facilities. I believe the process at Palm Springs would benefit greatly from further Congressional evaluation.

As you know, the National Air Traffic Controllers Association (NATCA) and the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) have raised a number of concerns about whether the Southern California TRACON will have adequate staffing and sufficient training to safely absorb the additional 220,000 operations from Palm Springs, which has a mountainous terrain and complex airspace. The So Cal TRACON is reported to be among the busiest in the world, with 2.2 million operations annually and growing rapidly. NATCA reports that the facility is dangerously short-staffed and operational errors there are on the rise. That is why you have also heard from 25 Members of Congress, including my colleague, Senator Dianne Feinstein.

It is important to note that NATCA has been a partner in many previous FAA TRACON consolidations, affecting dozens of facilities in and around Atlanta, Boston, Dallas, New York, Washington, DC and both Northern and Southern California.

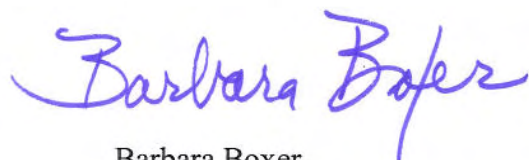
It greatly troubles me that the Palm Springs consolidation is not proceeding with the same cooperative spirit between the FAA and NATCA. That fact, in and of itself, is reason enough to delay this process until the FAA can better address the very serious safety and staffing questions that have been raised by the local air traffic controllers. These are the individuals we trust with our lives when we fly and I believe the FAA must do much more to address their very strong opposition to this consolidation and to address the concerns raised by the pilots as well.

The rapid growth of air travel in the Palm Springs area has strained the existing airport facilities and I am grateful to you and your staff for your willingness to work with the delegation to replace the airport's aging tower.

I now ask you to take immediate action to ensure that the proposed Palm Springs TRACON consolidation process is delayed until all parties are confident that it will not in any way affect the safety of the traveling public.

This is a most serious matter to me and I look forward to your very timely response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Barbara Boxer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Barbara Boxer  
U.S. Senator