

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 26, 2016

The Honorable Michael P. Huerta
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20591

Dear Administrator Huerta:

We write to express our concerns regarding the potential closure or consolidation of the Terminal Radar Approach Control (TRACON) at Grant County International Airport (MWH). Specifically, we believe this closure or consolidation would have potentially negative impacts on nearby military installations, notably Fairchild Air Force Base (FAFB) located in Spokane, Washington.

As you are likely aware, FAFB is home to the Air Force's 92nd Air Refueling Wing (ARW), and the Air National Guard's 141st ARW. These units are vital to war readiness and the security of our nation. Due to the extraordinarily cooperative and logistically-minded relationship between the MWH tower and TRACON, the air traffic control staff there regularly coordinate a variety of stakeholders with often unconventional and competitive needs. Due to this special arrangement, the ARWs stationed at FAFB consistently use MWH to train pilots in instrument radar and visual pattern operations that require expedited access to airspace. Training regularly includes touch-and-go exercises that would be next to impossible to conduct at a conventional airport with normal air traffic control operations.

Due to this unique arrangement and MWH's relatively close proximity to FAFB, MWH also serves as the ready reserve base for FAFB. In the event that severe weather or other emergencies prevent landing at FAFB, MWH serves as the alternate landing site for pilots. In 2011, the flexibility of operations at MWH allowed the 92nd ARW to relocate all of their tankers to MWH for nearly a year while FAFB underwent runway repairs.

We are greatly concerned that closure or consolidation of the MWH TRACON would result in diminished services for our military to use MWH as both an ideal training location and a reserve base. While some may claim that the transition of these services to another TRACON would be a seamless experience for users, we believe that outcome is unlikely. Currently, MWH tower and TRACON staff can meet quickly and in-person to address both planned and unplanned military maneuvers, and can rapidly respond to accommodate these needs and redirect other stakeholders using the port's facilities and airspace. It is very unlikely another TRACON center – potentially handling the traffic for numerous other airports around the region – would have the flexibility or capability to address the needs of these vitally important users at a moment's notice.

The authorizing language for the closure and consolidation process, Section 804 of the *FAA Modernization and Reform Act of 2012*, clearly directs that the FAA should only make reductions that, "can be implemented without adversely affecting safety." Closure or consolidation of the MWH TRACON would likely result in an immediate reduction in safety for military aircraft and other users

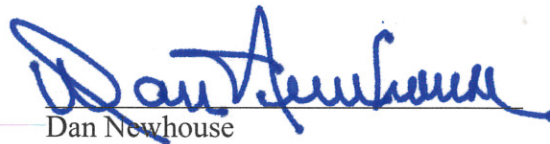
at MWH due to a decreased ability for the port to continue to handle these unique operations. It could also result in a medium to longer term adverse effect on our nation's safety by jeopardizing the effectiveness and war readiness of these important military operations. For example, if a degradation of services at MWH were to require the 92nd or 141st ARWs to seek a new port capable of accommodating these training and reserve base functions, it is likely a new location would be hundreds of miles further from FAFB. This additional flight time and distance would result in increased fuel, maintenance, and operational costs, as well as increased man-hours for military personnel, thus further impacting war readiness.

An October 29, 2015 letter from then 92nd ARW Commander, Colonel Charles McDaniel, to the Section 804 Collaboration Working Group expressed concern at the potential, "for a negative impact to the war readiness and capabilities of our USAF crew force..." should the MWH TRACON be closed or consolidated. We share in Colonel McDaniel's concerns, and ask that you prevent the closure of the TRACON facility at Grant County International Airport.

Sincerely,



Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Member of Congress



Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress