

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 20, 2016

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

Dear Administrator Huerta:

I write to provide supplemental information to you regarding a topic Senators Patty Murray (D-WA), Maria Cantwell (D-WA), and I previously wrote to you about on December 7, 2015. As you may recall from our previous letter, the possible closure or consolidation of Terminal Radar Approach Control (TRACON) at Grant County International Airport (MWH) is a topic of great concern for me, Senators Murray and Cantwell, our constituents, and many stakeholders in the region ranging from local business groups, major multinational businesses with a presence at MWH, and the U.S. military, which uses MWH for testing and training.

It has recently come to my attention that an air traffic controller currently stationed at MWH reached out to former MWH employees who have moved to other ports around the country in order to survey their thoughts on the impact of a potential TRACON closure or consolidation at MWH. While I understand this information may have already been shared with the 804 Working Group, the results were so telling, I felt compelled to also share the responses with you, which you will find enclosed. Of the 15 former employees Tower and TRACON employees who responded, 14 believe consolidation will negatively impact operations and user experience at MWH. Some of the respondents even suggested that closure or consolidation will adversely affect safety at MWH – an impact directly in contravention of the Federal Aviation Administration’s charge in carrying out consolidation and realignment activities¹.

Below are several excerpts I wanted to highlight for you that I believe exemplify the uniqueness of MWH, and the many concerns with the impacts that a TRACON closure or consolidation would have:

Grant County is probably the most complex facility I have ever seen. The mix of traffic, the requests of pilots, the coordination between both locals and radar, along with the different patterns to 8-10 runways, is something you only understand after working there. Everyone I tell about the operations cannot believe some of the things they do there.... If the radar is moved to another facility, I cannot fathom how the operation could ever stay the same.
– Margaret Skowronski

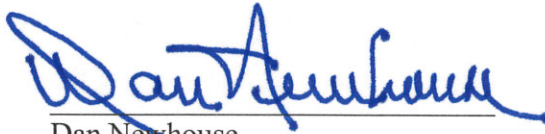
If the radar was taken from MWH it would kill the airport.... The reason that Boeing and the military go to Grant Co is because they know they can get done what they need to do. The uniqueness of the airport and its users [sic] it needs to have both the tower and approach on the same page working together.... It would not work to the benefit of anyone to move it.
– Amanda Cook

Again, it is important to note that these respondents are all former – not current – MWH employees,

1. FAA Modernization and Reform Act of 2012, Public Law 112-95, U.S. Statutes at Large 126 (2012): 120.

who are not only disinterested in the outcome of a potential closure or consolidation, but still have an in-depth understanding of air traffic control operations, and can reliably attest to standard and unique operations at the airport. I look forward continuing to provide you and FAA staff with any information or resources you may require to gain a better understanding of the true uniqueness of MWH activities. Furthermore, I continue to request your prevention of a closure of the TRACON facility at Grant County International Airport.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Dan Newhouse". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and a long, sweeping underline.

Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress

Enclosure