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**Congress of the United States**  
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May 27, 2008

Robert Sturgell  
Acting Administrator  
Federal Aviation Administration  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
800 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Mr. Sturgell:

I am writing again concerning air traffic control in Maine. In my April 16, 2008 letter to you, I raised questions about onerous demands on FAA controllers and serious safety hazards arising from severe understaffing at air traffic control facilities in Portland and Bangor. I also noted that the ATC facilities serving these airports do not appear to be on track to become NextGen compliant. In addition, the air traffic control facility at Portland is seriously deficient, not only with respect to radar control systems, but also because the building housing the facility is infested with mold and other contaminants. I look forward to your responses to my inquiries on these matters.

I write today because an additional issue has come to my attention which I believe to be crucial to the future safety of air traffic control of Maine airspace. I understand that the Federal Aviation Administration has changed its position regarding its use of the ATC facilities at the Brunswick Naval Air Station (BNAS). Previously, the FAA had requested and received approval for conveyance to the FAA of the BNAS radar approach control building, control tower, STARS automation equipment, and associated property after the closure of the base. This proposed transfer is welcome in Maine because it would provide a cost-efficient and sensible solution to overburdened approach and enroute air traffic control in the region, and would preserve the safety and other benefits of maintaining modern facilities for controlling approach/departure and enroute air traffic in Maine.

Now, however, the FAA has indicated that it has no current plans for the BNAS assets. Although the FAA has not yet given up its right to the property, given the current staffing and facility deficiencies in Portland, the import of the decision not to move forward immediately to prepare to use these assets is very troubling. Only one additional air traffic controller is in the training pipeline for Portland, and no money or space has been allocated for a new or improved air traffic facility at the Jetport. The FAA appears to be embarking on a plan to move the air traffic controllers currently responsible for handling approach/departure control and enroute air traffic control in this region away from Maine, presumably by expanding the role of Manchester Approach Control or Boston Center.

This outcome would be ill-advised for several reasons. First, the geographical displacement of ATC controllers away from the area they monitor would sacrifice their familiarity with the geography and landmarks of the region. While I understand that the ATC function is primarily dependent on the radar environment, the controllers' awareness of the local region's geography has been an important adjunct to air safety in the region. Second, consolidating air traffic control for a large region into one facility increases the potential danger from power outages, computer failures, natural disasters, or other catastrophes, thus lessening the backup capability of the FAA to safely control air traffic in the event of such eventualities. Third, the most efficient, effective, and economical solution to the infrastructure and staffing shortcomings at the Portland Jetport would be to take advantage of the BNAS ATC for air traffic approaching and departing as well as overflying the Portland area. The state of the art ATC equipment at BNAS, together with the tower, associated buildings, and aircraft hangers are all available cost-free to the public. Fourth, the cadre of fully qualified Navy air traffic controllers currently serving BNAS who are familiar with the local airspace and ATC equipment are a valuable resource which should not be dissipated. I am informed that several of these controllers are poised to leave military service and have expressed interest in remaining in the area to work at the air traffic control facility after base closure.

It makes no sense for the FAA to turn its back on this magnificent, free facility, with peerless controllers, in favor of an out-of-state facility that would have to be expanded, modernized and staffed, all at great expense to the taxpayer.

The closure of BNAS is expected to cause major economic and social losses to Maine, and the federal government should do what it can to mitigate their impact. In particular, the FAA can and should play a positive role in the redevelopment of the base and the preservation of job opportunities. The Brunswick Local Redevelopment Authority, with enormous input from the community, developed a base reuse plan that includes use of the airfield for general and corporate aviation, and aircraft manufacturing, maintenance, repair and overhaul. The presence of air traffic control facilities at the airfield can only enhance the prospects for these plans. To lose these well-paid, highly skilled ATC positions would only add to the region's economic problems.

In light of the reasons set forth above, I urge the FAA to move forward with plans to utilize the facilities at BNAS for air traffic control of the air space in this region. I look forward to your prompt response to my letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Allen", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Tom Allen  
Member of Congress

THA/jc