



U.S. Department
of Transportation

**Federal Aviation
Administration**

Office of the Administrator

800 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20591

DEC 22 2010

The Honorable Daniel K. Inouye
Chairman, Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Conference Report 111-366 (Public Law 111-117), accompanying the Fiscal Year (FY) 2010 Omnibus Appropriations Act, asked the Federal Aviation Administration to provide a report to the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations about the Agency's plan to increase the number of experienced controllers at the Southern California TRACON (SCT). Per the committee's direction, this plan includes clear interim benchmarks and establishes a goal of reducing the number of controllers in training at SCT to no more than the national average as soon as possible.

We are committed to increasing the number of fully certified controllers at the SCT. We are enhancing training methods and policies to reduce the number of trainees, which will in turn raise the number of certified controllers at the facility.

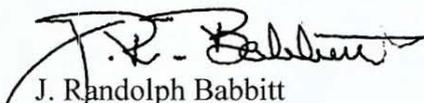
We have also made a commitment to limit the placement of new hires at complex facilities such as the SCT. Consequently, 90 percent of new hires reporting to this facility in FY 2010 will have either previous air traffic knowledge as a Certified Professional Controller transfer (CPC-IT), former military controller (VRA), or FAA reinstatement candidates.

We are also using financial incentives outlined in the 2009 labor agreement to encourage fully certified controllers to move to SCT. The higher pay scales in the 2009 labor contract have given employees a greater financial interest in moving to a higher-level facility, which subsequently, have given the FAA greater flexibility in staffing.

The SCT is a high-traffic facility and ensuring that this operation remains appropriately staffed is vital to the safety of the air traffic system. We are committed to providing the resources to ensure this facility is able to meet traffic demand and advance the safest air traffic system in the world.

Identical letters have been sent to Chairman Obey, Senator Cochran, and Congressman Lewis.

Sincerely,



J. Randolph Babbitt
Administrator

Enclosure



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DEC 22 2010

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Cochran:

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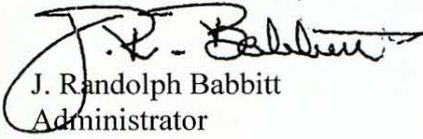
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DEC 22 2010

The Honorable David R. Obey
Chairman, Committee on Appropriations
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

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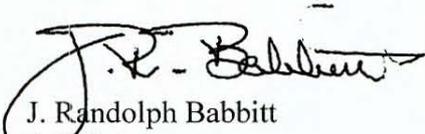
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The Honorable Jerry Lewis
Committee on Appropriations
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Lewis:

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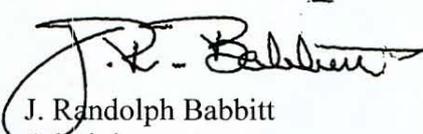
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Southern California TRACON

***Report to the House and Senate
Committees on Appropriations***



April 29, 2010

BACKGROUND

The House and Senate Committees on Appropriations have asked the Federal Aviation Administration to develop a strategic plan that increases the number of experienced controllers at the Southern California TRACON (SCT). As outlined in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2010 Omnibus Appropriations Act Summary, this plan “should also include clear interim benchmarks, and it should establish a goal of reducing the number of controllers in training at SCT to no more than the national average as soon as possible.”

SUMMARY

To support the FAA’s Flight Plan and the initiatives of the Air Traffic Organization (ATO), facilities across the country began in 2008 re-evaluating training procedures to prepare a new generation of air traffic controllers. Responding to the influx of new hires, SCT has made fundamental changes in its training philosophy and methods.

SCT has implemented several processes and procedures, and we expect to begin seeing positive results. For example, the facility expects to certify 10 Developmentals / Certified Professional Controllers – In Training (CPC-IT), in FY 2010, 15 in FY 2011 and 20 in FY 2012.

In FY 2010, SCT will receive 19 CPC-ITs that have previous radar experience. CPC-IT’s were Certified Professional Controllers at another air traffic facility. However, when a CPC transfers to a new facility, he or she becomes a CPC-IT at the new location. In the new location, the CPC-IT must learn a significant amount of site-specific information before certifying as a CPC at the new facility. Hiring experienced air traffic controllers will allow the FAA to increase the number of fully certified CPCs more quickly. FAA training reports show that on average, controllers without previous air traffic knowledge can take almost a year longer to reach full certification. Because of this, the FAA is working to ensure that the majority of new controllers placed at the SCT in FY 2010 have previous air traffic knowledge. In the meantime, the FAA will rely on position-qualified controllers in training to supplement the current 168 fully certified controllers. Position-qualified controllers have successfully completed part of their training and have certified on at least one position. Once certified on a position, these controllers are fully qualified to safely work that position independently.

Although we expect the changes made to the SCT training program to have a significant impact in developing fully certified controllers, the FAA has also made changes to the types of trainees SCT will receive in the coming years. In FY2010, in addition to CPC-ITs, the FAA will also work to place graduates from the Collegiate Training Initiative (CTI), and the Veterans’ Readjustment Appointment (VRA) programs into SCT. These candidates have some Air Traffic knowledge and experience and this will facilitate their progression to full certification.

Increasing the numbers of fully certified controllers is our overall goal, which will require the trainee percentage to remain above the national average of 27 percent in the short-term. A significant number of controllers will become retirement eligible over the next three years at

SCT. Even though only 13 will be subject to mandatory retirement, SCT is building up its controller trainee pipeline to address these future losses. We expect that the trainee ratio will remain above 30 percent for the next three years, after which it should begin to reduce towards the national average.

To increase the number of fully certified controllers in the near term, SCT will focus training resources on fully certifying CPC-ITs and developmentals in the third, and final, stage of training. As these controllers certify, the training ratio will decrease.

THE PLAN

The FAA is committed to increasing the number of fully certified controllers at SCT. To do this, we are enhancing training methods and policies to reduce the backlog of trainees, which will in turn raise the number of certified controllers at the facility.

We are also using financial incentives outlined in the 2009 labor agreement to encourage fully certified controllers to move to SCT. The higher pay scales in the 2009 labor contract have given employees a greater financial interest in moving to a higher-level facility, which subsequently, have given the FAA greater flexibility in staffing. The reintroduction of Controller Incentive Pay at SCT has also increased the incentive for controllers to transfer from lower level facilities to SCT.

Hiring Update

In the latter part of 2009, the FAA received more than 50 transfer requests from CPCs at other facilities applying for positions at SCT. In FY 2010, the facility will receive 27 CPC-ITs; 19 of whom have previous radar experience.

At the most recent Centralized Selection Panel in October of 2009, only VRA (former military personnel with air traffic experience) and former FAA air traffic controllers (*or reinstatement candidates*) were selected for SCT.

Between 1990 and 2005, most controllers that were placed in SCT were already fully certified at another facility and had operational experience. Consequently, training programs were geared to the already experienced employee. Due to the large wave of new hires over the past few years, fewer trainees at SCT have previous air traffic knowledge. To accommodate these individuals, SCT is making considerable changes to its training program.

The FAA's controller training is based on a combination of classroom and live traffic instruction – SCT's new program does not change that. Instead, SCT's revised training plan is based on changing the *methods* used to train and evaluate new controllers. The facility has also streamlined scheduling practices so that trainees spend more time training.

Increased use of Simulators

Radar simulators at SCT are reducing on-the-job-training time and providing a more streamlined training process for developmental controllers. These simulators are programmed with scenarios and occurrences exclusive to those airports, using actual aircraft with their respective call signs. Trainers can program departure and arrival paths and include

airport construction, new runways, weather patterns and any other situations particular to the location.

The training scenarios in the simulators are designed to be ten percent more difficult than the most challenging occurrence in the facility airspace. In four hours, controllers can accomplish meaningful training in the simulator equal to several weeks of on-the-job-training in the radar room.

SCT also developed a schedule program for the simulation laboratory. The schedule assigns specific simulation positions to specific developmentals and instructors, increasing the effectiveness of the simulation training.

Daily Requirements

SCT implemented daily requirements for all developmental controllers. A typical day requires five simulation problems be conducted, with eight periods of learning assigned, inclusive of the problems. Depending on staff availability, developmentals that are assigned in the operational areas are required to get at least four hours of on-the-job-training instruction per day.

SCT is also actively pursuing Web-based teaching tools. This would provide lower level trainees the ability to practice and enhance basic skills.

Radar Course Redesign

At the national level, the FAA is revamping the radar course given at the FAA Academy in Oklahoma City. Currently, the Academy provides new hires with initial and basic radar training to an ATC-8 facility level. These employees undergo radar Performance Verification to conclude their Academy training.

The FAA is developing a new Academy radar course that contains elements of both basic (ATC-8 and below) and advanced (ATC-9 and above) skills course which will require trainees to demonstrate their proficiency. The FAA will implement these radar course redesigns in the next 18 to 24 months.

Facility Evaluation Course

In the meantime, the FAA is examining the possibility of SCT offering a four- to six-week basic training course to evaluate each developmental's ability, similar to the course Potomac TRACON (PCT) and Chicago TRACON (C90) offer.

In both the PCT and C90 training models, new hires spend their first weeks learning the fundamentals of air traffic control. Although new hires spend 13 weeks at the Academy learning fundamentals, classes at the facility level are site specific – and are not based on fictitious or general airspace models. Priority of duties, air traffic procedures, and aircraft performance characteristics are just some of the topics reviewed during this period. Trainees are then evaluated based on their skill and performance, and then that information is used to determine where the new hire should begin training.

FY 2010 GOALS

SCT identified the following goals for FY 2010. The FAA will use the completion of these goals to track SCT's progress and evaluate success.

- In FY 2010 through FY 2011, no less than 90 percent of new controllers placed at SCT will have previous air traffic knowledge;
- Certify 10 Developmentals/CPC-ITs in FY 2010, 15 in FY 2011 and 20 in FY 2012;
- Review training data points monthly, including summaries of training progress and attrition by area and type (CPC-IT, VRA, CTI, and Public Hire) to identify trends and adapt to changing needs and requirements;
- Expand use of Web-based teaching tools;
- Establish On-Demand Instruction and ATC e-learning courses;
- Assess training progress using simulation capabilities; and
- Target 90 percent of controller developmentals to be on track¹ in their on-the-job training. *(The average for Level 12 Combined TRACONS is 80 percent of developmentals on track. Currently, SCT is at 87 percent, significantly higher than the average for large TRACONS.)*

CONCLUSION

Safety is the mission of the FAA. It is imperative that the flying public have confidence that the air traffic controllers managing their flight are the best at what they do. Training our controllers to maintain this confidence is a priority.

Over the next 5 years, SCT is projected to lose approximately 50 fully certified controllers to retirement. SCT is proactively bringing in new controllers, both CPC transfers as well as new hires with air traffic knowledge, to ensure that there are sufficient trained controllers when the more senior controllers retire. These larger numbers of trainees will result in higher than average trainee percentages over the next few years, but will allow SCT to be in a position to cover these expected losses.

Ensuring that the Southern California TRACON remains staffed with well-trained controllers is a priority for the FAA. SCT remains committed to providing these individuals the best, most efficient training possible.

¹ A developmental controller is considered to be on track when he or she progresses through the four stages at or below his or her allotted number of days. Both the facility and headquarters closely track Developmentals that exceed the allotment. The FAA reviews this data monthly and examines individual facility training practices and efficiency.