Federal Aviation Administration

MEMORANDUM

Date: September 28, 2026

To: Regional Airports Division Directors, AXX-600
Regional Airport Planning and Programming Branch Managers, AXX-610
Airports District Office Managers, XXX-ADO

WILLIAM C GARRISON Digitally signed by WILLIAM C GARRISON Date: 2026.09.28 15:13:07 -04'00'

From: William C. Garrison, Director, Office of Airport Planning and Programming, APP-1

Subject: Program Guidance Letter (PGL) 26-06: Digital Airport Traffic Control Tower (DT) Systems

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Summary

- Digital Tower (DT) systems (formerly referred to as Remote Towers) have been eligible under the Airport Improvement Program (AIP) statute since the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Reauthorization Act of 2018 (the 2018 Act), Public Law 115-254.
- The FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 (the 2024 Act), Public Law 118-63, included additional requirements related to DT systems.
- DT system eligibility is limited to airport sponsors that participate in the FAA Contract Tower (FCT) Program.[1]
- The Air Traffic Organization (ATO)/Airspace Modernization Office (AMO) approves entry into the FCT Program. ATO/AMO provide guidance and direction on statutory and administrative requirements. This includes direction on the required benefit cost analysis (BCA). Establishment of a traditional "brick and mortar" tower versus a DT system may alter BCA requirements.
- The Office of Airports (ARP) developed Engineering Brief (EB) 112, *Digital Airport Traffic Control Tower Systems Installation, Maintenance, and Airport Operations Considerations,* which includes system specifics for deployment on an airport.[2]
- A DT system may be eligible for AIP funding as a stand-alone new system installation for newly approved FCT candidates or, in certain circumstances, as a replacement for an existing brick and mortar tower if approved by ATO/AMO and ARP, consistent with EB 112. This eligibility includes equipment, installation, and the associated building if that

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[1] Funding is limited to FCT Program candidates and participants, per 49 § U.S.C. 47124(4)(B)(i). This includes those in the cost-share program due to having a benefit to cost ratio less than 1.

[2] EB 112 can be found at https://www.faa.gov/airports/engineering/engineering_briefs/EB-112-Digital-ATC.

building is located on airport property or leased to the sponsor. Costs for eligible on-airport equipment used to control traffic [i.e., Digital Tower Center (DTC)] at other eligible airport locations will be subject to proration.
- ATO/AMO is responsible for DT system integration into the National Airspace System (NAS). Many of the details related to DT system integration may be finalized after publication of this PGL.

Purpose

The purpose of this PGL is to explain DT system eligibility under current financial assistance programs administered by ARP for eligible airport sponsors. This PGL further implements Section 621 of the 2024 Act by identifying next steps for ARP personnel and airport sponsors. This PGL does not constitute operational approval.

Background

The 2018 Act first established AIP eligibility for DT systems by amending 49 United States Code (U.S.C.) § 47124 to incorporate DT systems, once certified, into the FCT Program. Accordingly, the funding permitted for DT systems followed FCT eligibility. Additionally, the 2018 Act amended 49 U.S.C. § 47116 to create eligibility for DT systems and FCTs under the small airport fund.

The 2018 Act also established a pilot program as a note under 49 U.S.C. § 47104, carrying out testing of the equipment and establishing limited eligibility once FAA certifies the equipment. These changes were implemented in Reauthorization PGLs (R-PGL) 19-02, *Planning & Project Eligibility*, and 19-04, *New Pilot Programs*.

Section 621 of the 2024 Act further amended 49 U.S.C. § 47124 in several ways that impact AIP funding. First, the 2024 Act directed the FAA to publish milestones to achieve system design and operational approval for a DT system, subsequently extending the original sunset date of the pilot program through fiscal year (FY) 2028. Additionally, the 2024 Act amended other sections of 49 U.S.C. Chapter 471 pertaining to funding requirements for certain types of projects, including those related to DT systems.

This PGL provides guidance to field personnel and airport sponsors regarding system design approval (SDA)[3] of the DT systems by the FAA, in accordance with the milestones prescribed in 49 U.S.C. § 47124 by Section 621 of the 2024 Act. SDA is the formal FAA process through which DT systems are evaluated against technical, safety, and operational requirements before operational use. On September 2, 2026, the FAA granted an SDA to Frequentis USA with conditions, as outlined in the approval letter.

[3] In accordance with 49 U.S.C. § 47124, the FAA will certify DT equipment, or the equipment will receive SDA.

Additional Implementation Guidance

Only DT systems that have successfully completed the FAA SDA process will be added to the FAA Approved Systems for Non-Federal Use List. Additional guidance on identifying such systems can be found in EB 112.

DIGITAL TOWER (DT) AIRPORTS

Digital Towers are defined in a statutory note to 49 U.S.C. §47104 as follows:

> *a remotely operated air navigation facility, including all necessary system components, that provides the functions and capabilities of an air traffic control tower whereby air traffic services are provided to operators at an airport from a location that may not be on or near the airport.*[4]

For the purposes of airport development grant programs administered by ARP in accordance with 49 U.S.C. Chapter 471, a DT system includes equipment that has received SDA from the FAA at eligible airports, as defined in EB 112, as well as any associated equipment needed to make the system functional.

ELIGIBILITY

Sponsors of airports accepted into the FCT Program who agree to the terms and conditions established under 49 U.S.C. 49 U.S.C. §47124(b) may pursue a DT option.

Sponsors can proceed if the FAA provides an SDA for the DT system. This approval is system specific and does not extend to unapproved DT technologies or configurations. In addition, sponsors can proceed with acquisition of a DT system when the manufacturer provides evidence of FAA approved manuals as required per EB 112.

Sponsors may meet 49 U.S.C. §47124(b)(4)(B)(i) eligibility requirements in two ways:

- The sponsor is a participant in the FCT Program (or cost sharing program); or
- The sponsor constructs a non-approach control tower[5] specifically to qualify for full participation in the FCT Program.

An existing brick and mortar tower is not required for entry as a DT under the FCT Program. If an airport sponsor has an existing sponsor-owned or FAA-owned brick and mortar FCT that has exceeded its minimum useful life, and/or is no longer maintainable or operationally functional, the sponsor may submit a request to the ATO/AMO to reconstruct it as a DT system. If approved, eligible sponsors may proceed with planning.

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[4] While the statutory definition of a Digital (Remote) Tower includes locations that "may not be on or near the airport," AIP eligibility is limited to locations controlled by the airport.

[5] Note that a "non-approach control tower" can be either digital or brick-and-mortar.

PLANNING

The FAA's Office of Airports Safety and Standards (AAS) published EB 112. This EB provides standards and guidance for the planning, design, and construction of airport infrastructure in support of DT systems. Sponsors should be familiar with this EB and must work with their Regional Office (RO)/Airports District Office (ADO) and ATO Non-federal Program Implementation Manager (PIM) for DT system consideration. Upon completion of ATO/AMO requirements, the ATO/AMO will issue a Project Approval Letter to become a designated DT facility. The sponsor must advise its RO/ADO of approval and provide a copy of the approval letter.

The sponsor must complete the following steps during the planning process:

- Identify where the on-airport components will be located on its Airport Layout Plan in accordance with 49 U.S.C. §47107(a)(16).
- Identify the estimated space required to host the DTC to accommodate the required equipment and the maintenance data terminal components. This must be based on design specifications and staffing levels approved by the ATO/AMO.
- Site proposed locations of DT system components on airport-owned or leased property.
- Include FAA planning review, environmental review, and airspace determinations for the proposed DT and DTC location(s).

The DT system must be owned, operated, and maintained by the sponsor and located on airport-owned or leased property to receive AIP funding. In addition, the system must enter the Non-Federal Program per FAA Order 6700.20, *Approval, Operation, and Oversight of Non-Federal Systems.* Sponsors assume responsibility for lifecycle maintenance and system upgrades. It may be necessary for the sponsor to lease towers or obtain property interests required to mount DT cameras and sensors. Such leases must have terms extending beyond the useful life of the DT system. The construction of space to house the DTC and maintenance equipment is AIP eligible under 49 U.S.C. §47124(b)(4), as the space will serve as an authorized Air Traffic Control Tower (ATCT).

The space may include:

- Sufficient space required for the DTC and maintenance equipment, based on the number of controllers approved, as allowed by 49 U.S.C. § 47124;
- Restrooms compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), as allowed by 49 U.S.C. § 47102(3)(F); and
- Security access controls, as allowed by 49 U.S.C. § 47102(3)(B)(ii).

If the sponsor does not have space available in an existing building for the DTC, the project may include expansion of an existing building to host the facility, construction of a building with the eligible space required, or leasing space consistent with the requirements.

FUNDING

Eligible airports may fund DT system projects, including planning and development costs, with apportionments under 49 U.S.C. § 47114(c)(1)(A) or (D), (c)(2), or (d)(2)(A). This includes primary, nonprimary, commercial service, and cargo apportionments, if applicable, but excludes state apportionment regardless of the airport type.

Eligible sponsors of small-hub or non-hub primary airports and nonprimary airports, including nonprimary commercial service airports, may request small airport funds for portions of the project in accordance with 49 U.S.C. § 47116(d)(2).

Eligible airports also may use Airport Infrastructure Grant (AIG) and FCT program funds provided under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, Public Law 117-58.

If an airport sponsor received approval from the ATO/AMO to reconstruct an existing brick and mortar FCT as a DT, regardless of building ownership, the costs for demolishing the existing building are not eligible under 49 U.S.C. § 47124. If the existing building is FAA-owned, the property is subject to disposal. In those cases, sponsors must coordinate with the ATO/AMO in accordance with 49 U.S.C. § 106(f)(2)(ii).

RO/ADOs should refer to the Grant Programming Assistance Resource (GPAR) for information on how to program grants for DT systems.