

Reason Foundation FAA Reauthorization

Recommendation: Remote Towers

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The legislative text is color-coded to identify its source. All text in green was adopted from the pending Senate bill S. 1939, Section 619. All text in red was adopted from the House-passed H.R. 3935, Section 529. All text in black is from Reason Foundation.

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(a) In general

Section 47124 of title 49, United States Code, as amended by sections 528 and 618, is amended—

(1) by redesignating subsection (h) as subsection (i); and

(2) by inserting after subsection (g) (as added by section 725), the following:

(h) Milestones for approval of remote towers

(1) In general

Not later than 180 days after the date of enactment of this subsection, the Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration shall create a structured program and publish milestones to achieve system design and operational approval for a remote tower system.

(2) Requirements

In carrying out paragraph (1), the Administrator shall—

(A) rely on support from the Airports Office of the Federal Aviation Administration and the Air Traffic Organization of the Federal Aviation Administration, including the Air Traffic Services Service Unit and the Technical Operations Service Unit;

(B) establish requirements for the system design and operational approval of remote towers, including —

(i) visual siting processes and requirements for electro-optical sensors;

(ii) datalink latency requirements; and

(iii) visual presentation design requirements for monitors used to display sensor and camera feeds;

- (C) use a safety risk management panel process to address any safety issues with respect to the remote tower;
- (D) if the remote tower is intended to be installed at a non-towered airport, assess the safety benefits of the remote tower against the lack of an existing tower;
- (E) allow the use of surveillance technology, either standalone or integrated into the visual automation platform, as a situational awareness tool;
- (F) support active testing of a remote tower system that has achieved system design approval at the William J. Hughes Technical Center at an airport that has installed remote tower infrastructure; and
- (G) not later than September 30, 2024, expand validation and certification of system design approval for a digital or remote tower system outside the William J. Hughes Technical Center to the airport at which a digital or remote tower will be installed and operated.

(3) Preservation of existing design approvals

Nothing in this subsection shall be construed to invalidate any system design approval activity carried out at the William J. Hughes Technical Center prior to the date of enactment of this subsection.

(4) Report to Congress

Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this subsection, and biannually thereafter, the Administrator shall submit a report to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate and the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure of the House of Representatives detailing the status of remote and digital tower projects in the system design approval and commissioning process.

(b) Conforming amendments

Section 47124(b) of title 49, United States Code, is amended—

- (1) in paragraph (3)(B)(ii), by inserting "or a remote airport traffic control tower that has received System Design Approval (SDA) from the Federal Aviation Administration" after "an operating air traffic control tower"; and
- (2) in each of clauses (i)(III) and (ii)(III) of paragraph (4)(A), by inserting "or remote air traffic control tower equipment that has received System Design Approval (SDA) from the Federal Aviation Administration" after "certified by the Federal Aviation Administration".