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February 28, 2024

Hon. Michael G. Whitaker, Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
U.S. Department of Transportation
800 Independence Ave, SW
Washington D.C. 20591

Dear Mr. Whitaker,

Congratulations on your confirmation as the newest Administrator for the Federal Aviation Administration. I hope your leadership will contribute to the safety and modernization of the American aviation industry. Also I would like to thank you for your testimony before the House Transportation and Infrastructure Aviation Subcommittee this month. It is essential that we as lawmakers hear directly from agency leadership in order to promote beneficial and common-sense laws.

I am writing today to encourage you to prioritize the replacement of the Air Traffic Control Tower (ATCT) at Gerald R. Ford International Airport (GRR). As the oldest tower of the top 75 busiest airports in the country, the tower at GRR is in desperate need of replacement and relocation. GRR is fully cooperative in the process of replacing the tower, we just need the FAA to take action. Tower design is 70% complete, but to fully complete the design and initiate construction, the FAA must commit to action and funding on replacing the tower.

GRR has pursued construction of a new ATCT since 1992, in 2019 the FAA execution team confirmed the necessity of relocating and rebuilding the ATCT, but the FAA has not taken the necessary steps to initiate the project in a timely manner. Currently, the Tower is located on top of the terminal building which impedes sightlines and hinders operations due to line-of-sight constraints. Locating towers on top of airport buildings is no longer allowed by the FAA in new designs because of these encumbrances. In order to ensure ATC operations are not impeded, it is essential that in rebuilding this tower it is also relocated from the top of the airport building. The FAA and the Gerald R. Ford International Airport Authority (GFIAA) utilized the Airport Facilities Terminal Integration Laboratory to confirm tower location, height and rotation via the approved siting report.

The GRR Tower is approaching 60 years old, older than any other of the top 75 busiest airports, and thus is falling far behind in technology and security requirements. The Tower is currently accessible from the airport terminal before security, a design no longer allowed by the FAA because it raises serious concerns for the safety and security of the Tower and the staff. This accessibility could enable bad actors to reach the tower and jeopardize airport and air traffic operations and the entire National Airspace System, potentially with life threatening consequences. Relocating the tower is an essential step in securing it, while modern security requirements and systems must also be utilized. The age of the tower combined with the exceptional pressure on the airport because of its rapid and increasing growth and demand over the years are hastening the urgency for immediate replacement. Continuing operations as they are is no longer a viable option.

The Tower is also out of compliance with ADA requirements, which prevents the recruitment and retention of staff in need of physical accommodations. At a time of incredible strain on the ATC workforce, it's essential that we are doing everything we can to ensure a healthy and safe workforce for our air traffic controllers, including making sure our ATCT's comply with federal laws. The replacement must incorporate accessible infrastructure to accommodate employees with disabilities.

While safety and accessibility issues are the most important reasons to prioritize relocating the GRR tower, the tower's location is also inhibiting other essential projects for the region. Due to line-of-sight issues, the GFIAA has been forced to deny expansion requests to advance multiple business development opportunities (aeronautical and non- aeronautical) on airport property. They are unable to construct the planned Phase II parking structure and are restricted on additional terminal expansions which are essential to accommodate the growing demand. Enplanement rates are rising and airport usage is up, the airport must be allowed to expand to improve the passenger experience while maintaining superior operations.

GRR has received Airport Improvement Project funds and has made great strides in modernizing the airport for improved passenger experience, the FAA has delayed following its own order to upgrade and relocate the tower, jeopardizing safety and also preventing the much needed expansion of the airport to accommodate the growing demand. This tower replacement project must be a priority for the FAA.

I appreciate your prompt attention to this issue and look forward to working with you to address these concerns and replace the Air Traffic Control Tower at GRR. I kindly request a written reply by March 15, 2024.

If you have any questions, please contact my Legislative Director, Bridget Lawson, at Bridget.Lawson@mail.house.gov

Sincerely,