

Israel, Bishop Send Letter Calling on FAA to Rethink Proposal that Could Increase Air Traffic Delays at Long Island MacArthur



Islip, NY—On Friday, U.S. Representatives Steve Israel (D-NY), Tim Bishop (D-NY) and Islip Town Supervisor Phil Nolan joined air traffic controllers and representatives from Southwest Airlines to express their opposition to the proposed relocation of air traffic control equipment from Islip to New Jersey. Israel and Bishop released a letter they're sending to FAA Acting Administrator Robert A. Sturgell that urges him to rethink agency plans to move vital departure spacing program (DSP) equipment from Islip to Morristown, New Jersey. The move could result in increased delays at Islip MacArthur Airport.

"Just when air travelers thought it couldn't get any worse, we receive the senseless news that the FAA will remove critical equipment that prevents delays and improves air traffic control from Islip airport and put it in New Jersey," said Congressman Israel, a member of the House Appropriations Committee, which sets funding levels for federal offices and programs. "The FAA is telling Long Islanders that they're convenience is less of a priority than air travelers in New Jersey. The Administrator of the FAA has agreed to meet to try to resolve this issue next week. If that doesn't work, we will fight this in his budget."

"As demands increase upon airports and air traffic controllers in the New York region, this is not the time to be turning back the clock on time-saving and live-saving technologies," said Congressman Bishop, a member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. "I will work to ensure that the dedicated air traffic controllers at MacArthur Islip Airport continue to have the resources and technology they need to keep our flights safe and on time."

Islip Supervisor Phil Nolan said, "This is absurd. Removing this critical departure spacing system from Long Island MacArthur Airport has the potential to undermine our exceptional 'on time' record, and result in delays and inconvenience for thousands of travelers. Furthermore,

removing this system from LIMA to solve the delays at another metropolitan area airport is a Band-Aid solution at best. The larger problem is the overall congestion in the skies above New York; the FAA would do well to focus on fixing that problem first."

"Removing this automated coordination means we will have to verbally communicate with the New York Center which will increase the demands on our time by 98%," said Jim Wecht, a representative for the air traffic controllers union. "Right now, we get approval from the computer system with red, green and yellow lights. This equipment works, it is proven to reduce delays, why get rid of it?"

MacArthur Airport (ISP) uses a piece of equipment called a Departure Spacing Program (DSP), which was first installed in its control tower in 2002. DSP technology provides electronic notifications of departure approval, provides flight routes and re-routes during bad weather and sequences aircraft more efficiently.

This equipment is used to communicate directly with the New York Center and updates all important data automatically. Currently, all of the major airports in the New York and New Jersey area utilize DSP technology. The projected move of the equipment to Morristown, New Jersey would pronounce understaffing issues at Islip by placing more demands on the already short-handed traffic controllers.

Understaffing of air traffic controllers is a nationwide problem. According to the National Association of Air Traffic Controllers, 500 controllers will have retired by February 3, 2008, with 2,200 more controllers eligible to retire by year's end.

As members of the House Appropriations Committee and Transportation & Infrastructure Committee respectively, Representatives Israel and Bishop today released a letter they sent to FAA Acting Secretary Robert A. Sturgell. The letter strongly urges that the decision to move the DSP technology from MacArthur airport be reversed.

A copy of the letter follows:

January 18, 2008

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

Mr. Sturgell:

As members of the House Appropriations Committee and Transportation & Infrastructure Committee respectively, it has come to our attention that the Federal Aviation Administration intends to relocate the Departure Spacing Program (DSP) equipment from MacArthur Islip

Airport Tower on Long Island to another location outside of New York State. We strongly oppose any plan to move this DSP equipment outside of New York and urge you to stop this from happening.

Currently, there are air traffic controller staffing constraints at MacArthur Islip Tower. The National Association of Air Traffic Controllers has projected that by February 3, 2008, 500 controllers will have retired, with 2,200 more controllers eligible to retire by year's end. DSP is vital for maintaining flight schedules during inclement weather and at peak travel times. All of the major airports in the New York/New Jersey area use this equipment to keep towers directly connected to the New York Center (ZNY) and automatically transmit updates of important data. DSP is also critical in maintaining a smooth flow of aircraft in and out of MacArthur Islip airport by updating key routes from the New York Center.

Relocating the DSP to the Morristown Tower in New Jersey will force the already overworked controllers at the Islip tower to manually call ZNY to reroute aircraft and perform other tasks that this equipment was designed to automate. In this day and age, the technology is readily available and essential in the New York region, which is home to one of the busiest airport networks in the world.

Both Morristown Municipal Airport and MacArthur Islip Airport have seen an increase in air traffic. Both airports are critical pieces of the New York/New Jersey Airspace and need access to technology that makes travel safe and efficient. For these reasons, DSP was invented and must be utilized at both airports.

Again, we respectfully request that you maintain DSP equipment at MacArthur Airport and we look forward to your prompt response to this matter.

Sincerely,

STEVE ISRAEL

TIM BISHOP

Member of Congress

Member of Congress