



# Pierce County

## Office of the County Executive

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March 12, 2013

Mr. Michael P. Huerta, Administrator  
Federal Aviation Administration  
US Department of Transportation  
800 Independence Ave, SW  
Washington DC 20591

Dear Mr. Huerta:

Pierce County is highly concerned about the negative impact to national interests and the local economic impact that would result from the closure of the contract tower at the Tacoma Narrows Airport (TIW) in Gig Harbor, Washington.

Tacoma Narrows Airport shares class Delta airspace with two military airfields; McChord Air Force Airfield located within five miles of our county airport and Gray Army Airfield located just three miles to the south. Complicating this concern is the growth in local military traffic which has increased approximately 15% from 2012 due primarily to growing helicopter traffic from Joint Base Lewis McChord.

McChord is a very active base and home to the only military C17 base on the west coast. The TIW contract tower provides general aviation separation services to avoid wake turbulence with the heavy military C17's. The final approach to McChord is often congested with air traffic as is also a well used approach corridor for Visual Flight Rule (VFR) aircraft inbound to TIW. This is especially true when C17's descend through 2000 feet, just five miles NE of TIW. The TIW tower also provides separation with aircraft on Instrument (IFR) approach to Gray Army Airfield.

County staff was recently invited to meet with Joint Base Lewis McChord military safety officers to receive a briefing on a recent aircraft incursion that took place in this shared airspace. The contract tower at TIW remains critical to the effective communication with non-military pilots flying in this complicated, congested and limited area to help alleviate this type of safety situation.

The closure of the tower will also cause a negative economic impact to the local economy as airport businesses experience a reduction in operations for fueling and other services. The closure will also cause the cost of flight instruction to dramatically increase since student pilots are required to obtain the skills necessary to operate at a controlled airport. If the closures happen as planned, student pilots will be forced to travel further and likely experience flight delay when using Sea-Tac International Airport or King County International Airport (Boeing Field).



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Tacoma Narrows Airport features an additional benefit not offered by Sea-Tac and Boeing Field in that we maintain four distinct types of approaches used by general aviation pilots; an instrument landing system, a GPS approach for each runway and a non-direct radial beacon approach. These facilities support significant flight training from throughout the region.

I urge you to reconsider the closure of contract towers due to the negative impact to aviation and especially the Tacoma Narrows Airport tower due to its proximity to heavily used military and general aviation corridors.

Sincerely,



Pat McCarthy  
Pierce County Executive

cc. Senator Patty Murray  
Senator Maria Cantwell  
Congressman Derek Kilmer  
Stan Flemming, County Councilman District 7  
Brian Ziegler, Director, Public Works and Utilities  
Deb Wallace, Airport and Ferry Administrator, PWU