

June 13, 2023

The Honorable Sam Graves  
Chairman  
House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee  
2165 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20525

Chairman Graves,

I applaud our entire Arizona delegation's efforts to support the Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport as it seeks to safely accommodate growth in passenger service. I particularly thank Representative Stanton for leading this project.

Gateway Airport has become the 35<sup>th</sup> busiest airport in the United States, but due to its status as a contract tower, can only manage flights between 7:00 AM and 10:00 PM. Flights arriving before 7:00 AM or after 10:00 PM receive no guidance from the Gateway Airport control tower. This situation is unacceptable. Congress should provide growing airports with a process to convert contract towers into FAA towers; however, this should be done in a manner that is revenue neutral.

In 2007, Gateway Airport served 0 commercial passengers. In 2022, it served nearly 1,850,000. The problem arises because the Gateway Airport tower is a contract operation that needs to convert to FAA status, but there is currently no mechanism to make the conversion.

In a 2020 report, the Inspector General for the Department of Transportation reported that contract towers provide air traffic control services at \$1.5 million less than FAA towers on average due to lower staffing and salary levels. The report also highlighted the fact that FAA has no current program for converting contract towers into FAA towers or converting FAA towers into contract towers. In a review of the FAA Contract Tower Program undertaken by this Committee in 2012, the Chairman's opening statement emphasized that, while the program was just as safe and more cost-efficient than comparable FAA towers, the program is intended for **low-activity** airports. By any measure, Gateway Airport has outgrown this designation.

A discussion draft of the pilot program proposed by the Stanton amendment contemplated offsetting the increased costs of new FAA towers by establishing a pilot program to convert existing FAA towers at low-activity airports to contract towers. I am supportive of efforts to provide Gateway Airport with a path to increase air traffic control capacity; however, I would prefer that the costs of any new program would be offset by practical cost reductions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Andy Biggs". The signature is stylized with a large, looped "A" and "B".

Andy Biggs  
Member of Congress