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STATEMENT OF
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BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INVESTIGATIONS AND OVERSIGHT
OF THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
PUBLIC WORKS AND TRANSPORTATION
ON
FAA'S AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLER WORK FORCE

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

We appreciate this opportunity to appear once again before this Subcommittee to discuss the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA's) progress in rebuilding the air traffic controller work force.

In September 1985 the Secretary of Transportation announced that the controller work force would be increased by about 1,000 during fiscal years 1986 and 1987. Her announcement has generated widespread congressional and public interest about

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whether there are enough controllers to safely handle air traffic that has now reached record levels and is expected to continue to grow.

FAA's end-of-fiscal-year-1986 goal is to have a controller work force of 14,480. We are here today to discuss the validity of this goal and how best to track FAA's staffing progress.

Our work has shown that a fair amount of confusion exists concerning who comprises FAA's controller work force and the terminology FAA uses in reporting to the Congress on its work force size and its progress toward meeting its goals. Our March 1986 report¹ made several recommendations to FAA to improve the clarity of its reports to the Congress on meeting its goals. My testimony today will outline our findings on this issue and expand upon our recommendations to FAA on the basis of additional work we have done.

PROBLEMS WITH THE WAY FAA REPORTS
ITS CONTROLLER WORK FORCE

We think there are two underlying problems with the way FAA has been reporting the controller work force to the Congress.

--First, as defined by FAA, the work force includes people who will never control traffic. Thus, FAA could meet its end-of-fiscal-year-1986 goal of 14,480 without increasing the number of people actually controlling traffic.

Further, FAA's method of counting excludes other people who do control traffic.

¹Aviation Safety: Serious Problems Concerning the Air Traffic Control Work Force (GAO/RCED-86-121, Mar. 6, 1986).

- --Second, FAA has used the term "operational controller" as the key indicator for gauging staffing progress within the controller work force. This term lumps together controllers who have significantly different responsibilities, levels of experience, and training, making it difficult to track FAA's real staffing progress and the actual composition of its work force.

FAA'S DEFINITION OF THE
CONTROLLER WORK FORCE
SHOULD BE REVISED

The controller work force is a subset of air traffic service personnel which also includes first-line supervisors, facility managers, flight service station specialists, traffic management coordinators, training specialists, personnel management specialists, and secretaries. We believe that only those traffic service personnel who are actively engaged in the separation and control of air traffic should be counted in the controller work force.

As FAA defines them, there are three basic categories of employees comprising the controller work force--full performance level controllers or FPLs, developmental controllers, and air traffic assistants. FPL controllers are fully certified to operate all positions in a defined area. Developmental controllers include all persons undergoing training at the FAA academy, all being trained at FAA field facilities, and other trainees or "predevelopmental" persons in special programs such

as upward mobility. Air traffic assistants or ATAs are employed solely for clerical duties at field facilities. These duties were previously performed by controllers when they were not working at control positions such as radar scopes. The vast majority of ATAs are employed at air route traffic control centers (hereafter referred to as centers), which control flights between airports, and at the more complex terminal facilities.

ATAs should not be counted in the controller work force

Chart 1 shows the size and composition of the controller work force as reported by FAA immediately before the 1981 strike and as of June 30, 1986. One difference between the two bar graphs is the new employee category--the air traffic assistant--shown in the bar graph on the right.

We believe that ATAs should not be counted in the controller work force because they do not control traffic and are not trained to. Moreover, FAA does not count support staff in its other technical work forces, such as its safety inspector work force.

The difference between controllers and ATAs is highlighted in a February 1986 letter from the FAA Administrator to the Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation on why FAA had decided not to meet its fiscal year 1985 ATA goal. The Administrator's letter stated that while ATAs are limited in their work assignments, controllers are not. The

Administrator pointed out that, as a result, controllers can perform their own duties and the lesser duties assigned to ATAs; therefore, increasing the number of controllers and decreasing the number of ATAs would have "positive effects on the productivity capability" of FAA's controller work force.

Trainees should also not be counted
in the controller work force

Chart 1 also shows another difference in the composition of the controller work force--a 23-percent increase in the number of developmental controllers from about 3,000 to about 3,700. While an increase in this employee category should be expected as FAA attempts to recover from the strike, many persons in this category will not become FPLs.

FAA's definition of a developmental controller includes persons undergoing initial training at the FAA academy, starting with their first day. Thus, FAA is counting as controllers, trainees who do not control traffic. And, because of the attrition rate at the academy, 40 percent of them never will.

We believe that persons undergoing initial training at the academy as well as persons in special programs such as upward mobility should not be counted as developmental controllers in the controller work force because they do not control traffic. Conversely, we believe that developmental controllers at control facilities should be included in the work force because they are equivalent to FPLs when they work positions for which they are qualified.

Others should be added to the
controller work force

We also believe that about 1,800 first-line supervisors and 230 traffic management coordinators at control facilities, who spend part of their time controlling traffic, should be included in the controller work force. Our survey of some 1,000 first-line supervisors at the 20 centers and the 54 busiest terminal facilities in the continental United States showed that they were spending about 36 percent of their time working traffic. While FAA is trying to reduce the amount of time supervisors spend controlling traffic, FAA policy requires them to rotate through all positions on which they are certified each month and to spend at least 10 percent of their time working traffic. According to the FAA Administrator, this is so that they retain currency and full appreciation of the work environment of FAA controllers.

Similarly, traffic management coordinators help manage air traffic flows to provide greater efficiencies in airspace usage and stabilize controller work load. They are selected from the ranks of FPLs and must meet the same rotational and minimum time on position requirements as first-line supervisors.

Chart 2 shows that if the controller work force were redefined as we suggested, its size, as of June 30, 1986, would have been 14,080 instead of 14,262. Excluding the ATAs and persons undergoing initial training at the FAA academy would not be completely offset by including the first-line supervisors and

traffic management coordinators. It would, however, provide a better baseline for measuring staffing progress. It would also make the work force consistent with the legal definition of air traffic controller under 5 U.S.C. 2109 that provides for early retirements.²

FAA SHOULD STOP USING THE TERM
OPERATIONAL CONTROLLER

The second problem with the way FAA reports to the Congress on the controller work force is its use of the term operational controller as the key indicator or "best proxy" for gauging staffing progress. As defined by FAA, all FPLs and those developmental controllers certified on at least two nonradar or radar positions are operational controllers.

We found that as a gauge for measuring staffing progress, this term is misleading. For example, at the centers, the term operational controller lumps developmental controllers who are certified on only two nonradar positions with FPLs who are fully certified to operate all positions in a defined area and are actually controlling traffic. Further, although FAA has frequently referred to "operational controller staffing goals," no such goals exist at the facility level where the term has little or no significance. Facility managers are primarily concerned with achieving and maintaining their authorized staffing levels and increasing their complement of FPLs.

²Public Law 99-335 amended Title 5 to include flight service station specialists in the legal definition of air traffic controllers effective January 1, 1987. These specialists do not, however, control traffic.

THE TERM "FPL" IS A BETTER INDICATOR
OF STAFFING PROGRESS

We believe that a better indicator of staffing progress is the number of FPLs. Our March 1986 report shows that the shortage of FPLs at many major facilities has resulted in (1) controllers and supervisors believing they are overworked during peak periods, especially at centers, (2) high levels of overtime at the centers, and (3) problems with the quality and amount of on-the-job training being given to new controllers. Supervisors confirmed that each of these factors, in turn, negatively affects the maintenance of air traffic control system safety. Moreover, using the FPL category to measure progress in rebuilding the controller work force would be consistent with FAA's facility staffing goals.

Our position is supported by statements on the importance of FPLs. For example, the Department of Transportation (DOT) informed the Office of Personnel Management, in a May 1985 request for continuing a waiver of time-in-grade requirements for controller promotions, that because of the technically complex nature of controller duties, it is essential that it meet a goal of at least 75-percent FPLs at its facilities.

FAA, however, has confused the issue by sometimes reporting progress toward meeting its goal of 75-percent FPLs by using operational controllers. For example, DOT's July 16, 1986, response, prepared by FAA, to our report states that only 4 centers and 44 terminal facilities in the continental United

States have not reached the 75-percent goal for operational controllers. As far as we know, there is no such goal, and all 20 centers and 87 of the terminal facilities had not reached the 75-percent FPL goal.

Chart 3 compares the number of FPLs at the 20 centers in the continental United States to the 75-percent FPL goal. It shows that FAA is still over 900 FPLs short of its goal.

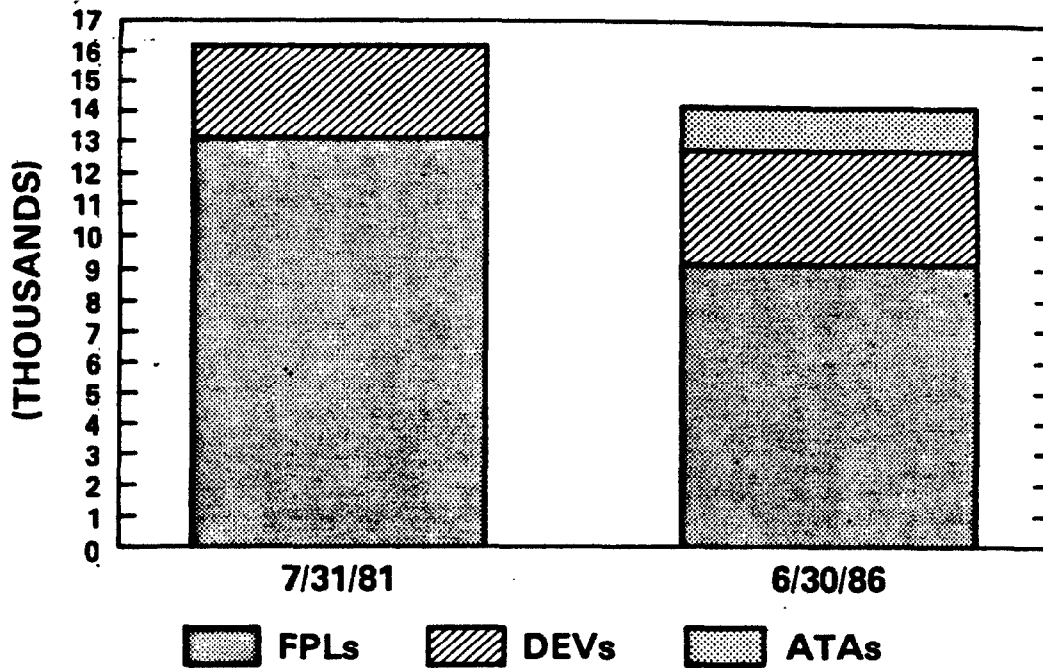
Chart 4 shows the net monthly gain in FPLs at the centers for the first 9 months of this fiscal year and the years needed to meet the 75-percent FPL goal at the present rate of gain. The chart shows, for example, that 11 of the 20 centers gained fewer than 2 FPLs per month, and at the present rate of net gain, it will take half of the centers 3 or more years each to reach the FPL goal.

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In summary, we found that FAA's end-of-fiscal-year-1986 controller work force goal of 14,480 is not a valid measurement of staffing progress because it includes people who will never control traffic. We believe, therefore, that FAA should revise its definition of the controller work force to include only those who are actively engaged in the separation and control of air traffic. FAA should then establish a new controller work force staffing goal on the basis of valid staffing standards. We also believe that FAA should stop using the term operational controller as the key indicator of staffing progress and use instead the number of FPLs.

• This concludes my testimony, Mr. Chairman. I will be happy to answer any questions you or other Subcommittee members may have at this time.

CHART 1 AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL WORK FORCE ALL CENTERS AND TERMINALS



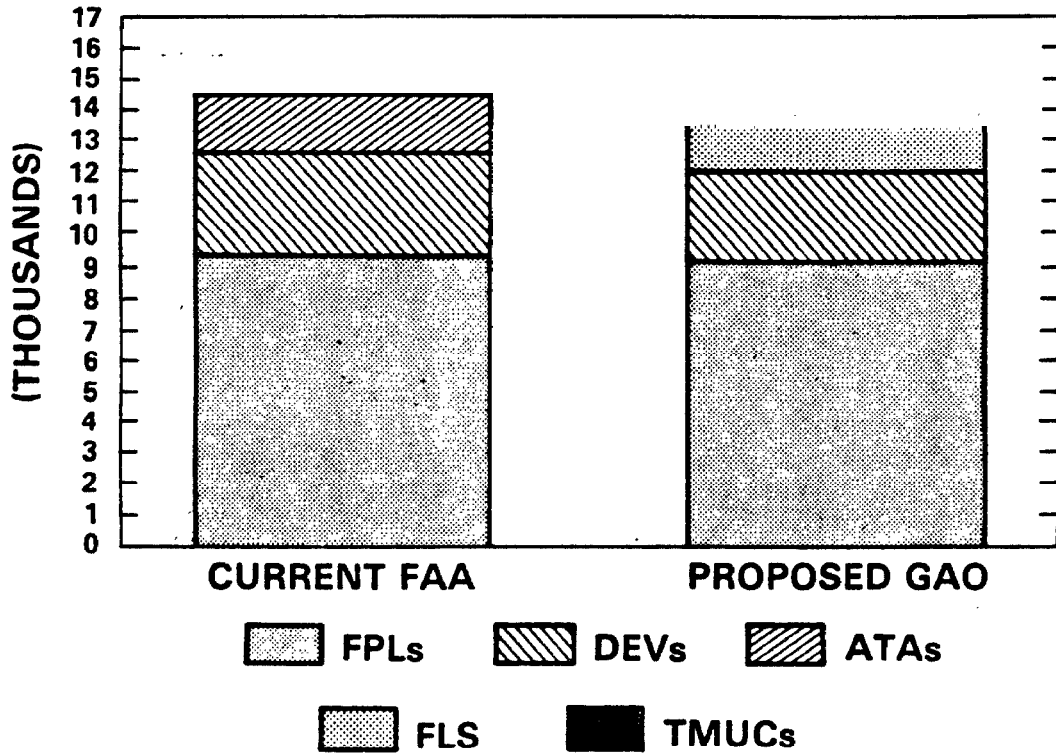
AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL WORK FORCE:

	<u>7/31/81</u>	<u>6/30/86</u>
FULL PERFORMANCE LEVEL CONTROLLERS (FPLs)	13,205	9,069
DEVELOPMENTAL CONTROLLERS (DEVs)	3,039	3,728
AIR TRAFFIC ASSISTANTS (ATAs)	<u>0</u>	<u>1,465</u>
	<u><u>16,244</u></u>	<u><u>14,262</u></u>

CHART 2

AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL WORK FORCE

ALL CENTERS AND TERMINALS (AS OF JUNE 30, 1986)



AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL WORK FORCE:

	<u>CURRENT FAA</u>	<u>PROPOSED GAO</u>
FULL PERFORMANCE LEVEL CONTROLLERS (FPLs)	9,069	9,069
DEVELOPMENTAL CONTROLLERS (DEVs)	3,728	2,984
AIR TRAFFIC ASSISTANTS (ATAs)	1,465	0
FIRST LINE SUPERVISORS (FLS)	0	1,797
TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT UNIT COORDINATORS (TMUCs)	0	230
	<u>14,262</u>	<u>14,080</u>

CHART 3
FULL PERFORMANCE LEVEL CONTROLLERS
AT THE 20 CENTERS IN THE
CONTINENTAL UNITED STATES
(AS OF JUNE 30, 1986)

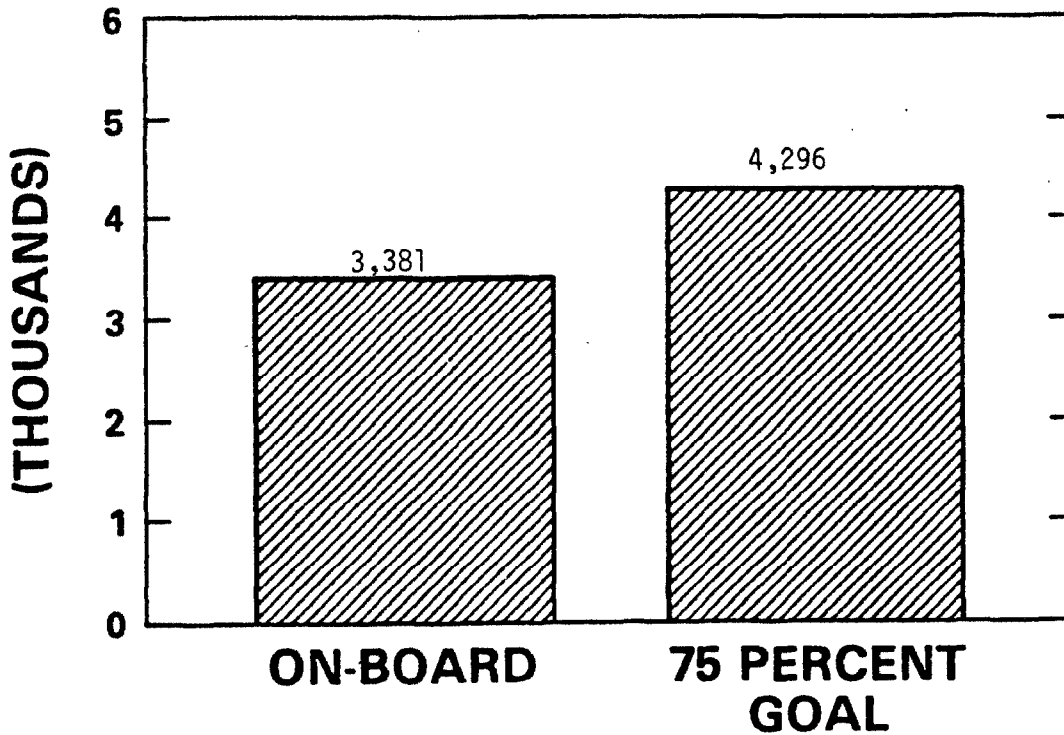
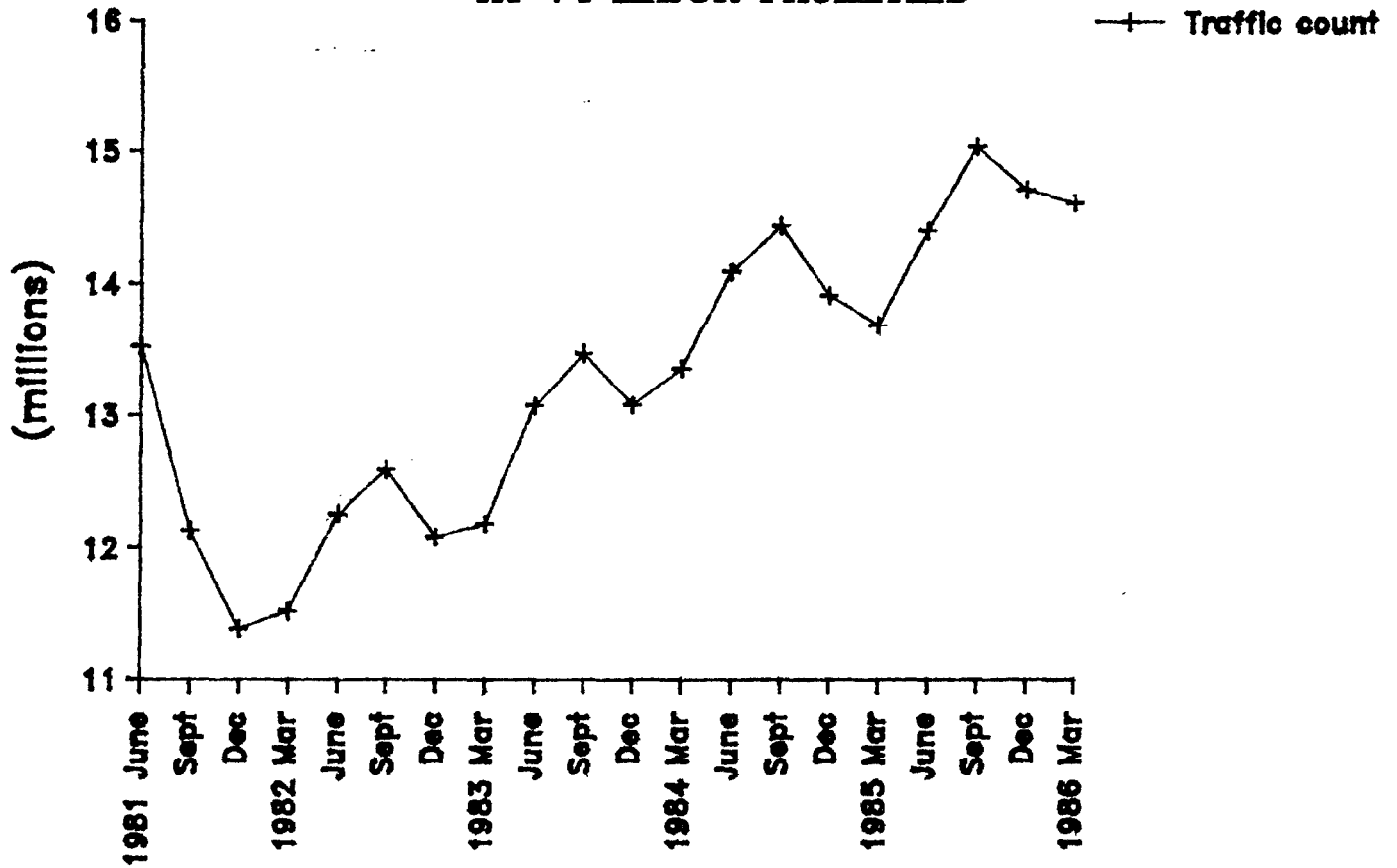


CHART 4
AVERAGE NET MONTHLY GAIN FOR FPLs
AT THE 20 CONUS CENTERS AND THE
ESTIMATED YEARS REQUIRED TO MEET
75% FPL STAFFING GOAL

<u>CENTER</u>	<u>NET MONTHLY GAIN¹</u>			<u>YEARS TO MEET GOAL</u>
	<u>LESS THAN 2</u>	<u>2 TO 4</u>	<u>GREATER THAN 4</u>	
MIAMI	X			7
INDIANAPOLIS	X			6
JACKSONVILLE	X			4
WASHINGTON, D.C.	X			3
CLEVELAND	X			3
MEMPHIS	X			3
FORTH WORTH	X			3
MINNEAPOLIS	X			3
ALBUQUERQUE	X			1
BOSTON	X			2
SALT LAKE CITY	X			1
NEW YORK		X		3
CHICAGO		X		3
ATLANTA		X		2
DENVER		X		2
KANSAS CITY		X		2
LOS ANGELES		X		2
OAKLAND		X		2
SEATTLE		X		<1
HOUSTON			X	<1

¹FOR FIRST 9 MONTHS OF FISCAL YEAR 1986

AIR TRAFFIC ACTIVITY AT 74 MAJOR FACILITIES



Growth In Air Traffic Activity

Comparison of First Quarters in 1981 and 1986

Centers and Terminal Facilities With More
Than a 10 Percent Increase Between 1981 and 1986

<u>Centers</u>	<u>Percent Increase</u>	<u>Terminal Facilities</u>	<u>Percent Increase</u>
1. Atlanta	29.9	1. Newark	58.9
2. Salt Lake City	27.2	2. Chicago	46.2
3. Washington, D.C.	22.7	3. Baltimore-Washington	43.3
4. Kansas City	20.9	4. Charlotte	40.6
5. Denver	20.0	5. Burbank	34.0
6. Minneapolis	19.8	6. New York TRACON <u>1/</u>	33.7
7. New York	18.1	7. Detroit	30.0
8. Albuquerque	15.7	8. Dallas-Fort Worth	28.2
9. Boston	15.6	9. St. Louis	27.1
10. Miami	15.3	10. Minneapolis	23.7
11. Cleveland	14.6	11. San Francisco	22.1
12. Los Angeles	14.5	12. Memphis	20.1
13. Seattle	12.4	13. Pensacola	20.0
14. Jacksonville	12.0	14. Orlando	18.8
15. Memphis	11.4	15. Atlanta	18.5
16. Indianapolis	10.1	16. Dayton	17.4
		17. Oakland TRACON	16.3
		18. Edwards AFB	14.9
		19. Phoenix TRACON	14.3
		20. Phoenix	13.6
		21. Jacksonville	12.3
		22. La Guardia	11.1

1/ TRACON = Terminal Radar Approach Control facility.