

# Section 804 – Re-evaluation of FAA Tower Operations

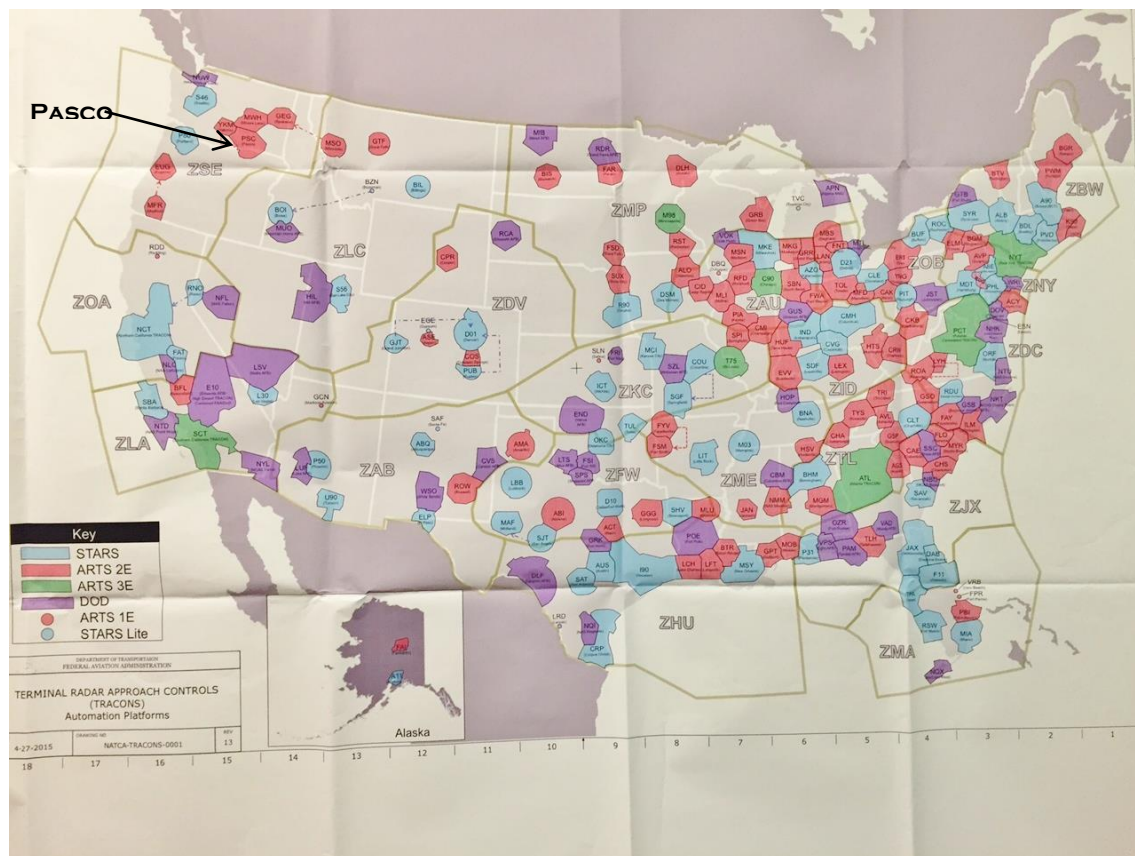
By Marjy Leggett

**WHEN:** On June 9, 2015 I participated in a meeting of approximately 20 people to discuss the required Section 804 FAA meeting to assess tower operations. Three of us were GA pilots. The others were officials from the FAA and airport and tower representatives.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of the required report is to (A) support the transition to the Next Generation Air Transportation System; and (B) to reduce capital, operating, maintenance, and administrative costs of the FAA where such cost reductions can be implemented without adversely affecting safety.

The FAA has been ordered by the government (FAA Authorization Act of 2012) to “tighten its belt,” euphemistically called “realignment.” The FAA Authorization Act of 2012 requires the FAA to produce an annual report including all stakeholders in the decisions.

The FAA is looking at combining Chinook Approach with a larger facility, such as Seattle, Portland, or Spokane to save operating costs. This realignment is being done across the country, but unlike the East, the West has a much larger territory to cover.



Seattle, Portland, or Spokane are being considered because they are or will soon be “Next Gen Ready”. Tri-Cities is slated to receive Next Gen equipment in 2016. The decision to realign is not allowed to affect safety, but is allowed to affect operations. The Pasco Tower would remain open, but the radar services would be handled by

another facility. Those currently operating the Pasco radar services would be sent to train those in the other facility.

### **Questions:**

Will “Joe” in “Seattle Center,” for example, oversee a larger sector or will “Seattle Center” hire additional people to handle the increased number of sectors? As a larger sector, will the controller be able to handle the additional workload, and if additional controllers are hired, how does that save money?

**Answer:** *It may not be a cost savings and that is something we will have to look at. Seattle pays higher wages, so it may cost more to hire additional controllers. Also, there will need to be wiring running from Pasco to Seattle, which is part of the expense.*

How will moving radar services to another facility affect pilots requesting practice approaches, flight following, Young Eagle flights where each pilot is given a squawk code, etc.

**Answer:** *It may be that it doesn’t work for the Pasco radar service area to be consolidated. But the overtaking facility would offer the same services as you are receiving now. We will have to look at this. The transfer site would provide 24 hour approach control service, unlike the 6 to 10 hours of service you have now.*

Is this paving the way to eventually eliminate the Pasco Tower or turn it into a contract tower?

**Answer:** *No. We don’t see that happening.*

Are there lessons learned from other facilities that have consolidated?

**Answer:** *Yes, and we have implemented those lessons.*

### **Timeline:**

Once the analysis is complete, the final recommendation will be made. There will be a 45 day comment period by the public. The analysis will be presented to the FAA by early spring of 2016 for a final decision.

Comments may be made through the end of September, 2015. Send comments to

[traciezaring@charter.net](mailto:traciezaring@charter.net) or call 509-554-0826

### **Comments:**

Comments should address safety or how consolidation will or will not cut costs. Examples of possible subjects are:

- Circumventing Restricted Areas
- Practice approaches
- Flight Following
- Terrain unique to this area
- Local restrictions and issues
- Local weather

The site can be accessed by going to [www.faa.gov](http://www.faa.gov) and searching for Federal Register, Section 804.

Most of the FAA personnel, engineers, and tower representatives attending the meeting had never been east of the Cascades, so were unfamiliar with our circumstances.