

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEES

JUDICIARY
RANKING MEMBER, SUBCOMMITTEE ON
INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS
RANKING MEMBER, SUBCOMMITTEE ON
FISHERIES, WATER, AND WILDLIFE

AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION,
AND FORESTRY

SMALL BUSINESS AND
ENTREPRENEURSHIP

July 23, 2026

The Honorable Bryan Bedford
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Administrator Bedford:

I write to acknowledge the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) ongoing efforts to modernize the National Airspace System and to raise concerns shared by many Californians regarding a gap that remains under-addressed in the Administration's current approach: the physical replacement of aging air traffic control towers. I respectfully request a response on how the FAA plans to address this issue given the funding now available to the agency.

The case for urgency is well-documented. In the prior Administration's FY 2025 budget submission, the FAA provided a detailed accounting of the state of its tower inventory. That document identified more than 250 FAA-owned air traffic control facilities that are 21 years of age or older – with an average age of 41 years – and catalogued 174 of them as being in poor condition, which impacts operational reliability and controller retention and readiness. California is disproportionately represented in that inventory. The FAA's own FY 2025 budget appendices identify more than 25 California towers or TRACONs in poor condition, including facilities at Los Angeles International, San Diego, Burbank, Long Beach, Napa, Palo Alto, Riverside, and numerous others ranging from the San Joaquin Valley to the Bay Area. Several of these appear on the FAA's own candidate list for near-term replacement. Collectively, they serve one of the busiest and most complex airspace environments in the world.

One facility illustrates the broader challenge in California: the Air Traffic Control Tower at Riverside Airport (RAL). Built in 1968, this 57-year-old structure is the eighth-oldest FAA-owned air traffic control facility in the country. Despite handling approximately 144,000 annual takeoffs and landings, making it one of the busiest FAA Federal Contract Towers in the state, the FAA's ATC Inventory rates it in "poor" condition and has not indicated a timeline for upgrades or repairs to this critical facility. The tower is not ADA accessible, suffers from line-of-sight obstructions to a portion of its primary runway, and offers inadequate facilities for the controllers who operate it daily.

While the FY 2027 budget requests \$4 billion for Facilities and Equipment, it appears to fund the replacement of just three air traffic control towers nationwide. I am aware that Congress previously delivered a substantial down payment for NAS modernization – providing more than \$12 billion – including for ATCT and TRACON replacement, in prior legislation. However, I am concerned that the current pace and ill-defined time frame dedicated specifically to tower replacement are not commensurate with the scale and significance of the problem. Given that the Administration has indicated that an additional \$20 billion will be needed to complete its modernization agenda, it is critical that we understand how much of that funding is being prioritized for these failing physical structures.

I also note that the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) provided meaningful funding for FAA Facilities and Equipment, including for tower replacement – and I am supportive of ensuring that any remaining BIL-authorized resources are deployed toward high-priority projects, including those in California, before those funds expire.

I respectfully request that the FAA provide my office with a written update describing:

1. Which specific air traffic control tower replacement projects the agency expects to fund in the next several years, including a year-by-year schedule of anticipated design and construction starts, and from which funding sources;
2. How California's tower inventory — including the facilities identified as candidates for replacement in the FY 2025 budget submission — is being prioritized and the specific weighting criteria used (e.g., age, facility condition index, traffic complexity, ADA compliance, and line-of-sight safety restrictions);
3. The explicit operational threshold or criteria the FAA uses to determine when an aging facility can no longer be sustained via minor improvements and must be fully replaced;
4. The agency's plan for addressing the full scope of tower replacement need across the National Airspace System given the likely funding gap, including how much of the identified \$20 billion in additional modernization needs specifically reflects tower replacement costs; and
5. What additional funding is needed from Congress to address any unmet needs for tower replacement nationwide.
6. An update on funding and outcomes for BIL expenditures for FY2025 and FY2026, and plans for any remaining resources.

We request a formal, written response to the questions and concerns raised in this letter no later than August 21, 2026.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Adam B. Schiff". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Adam" and last name "Schiff" being more legible than the middle initial "B.".