



Chapter 736 Newsletter for December 2016



FAA Expands Enhanced Vision Capabilities

The FAA published a final rule on Tuesday that will allow operators to use an enhanced-vision flight system to descend all the way to the runway, under certain conditions. Currently, the FAA allows pilots to depend on enhanced vision in lieu of natural vision only to 100 feet above the runway, and only under certain straight-in landing procedures. The new rule requires pilots to be flying straight-in procedures on an instrument flight plan. The rule establishes pilot training and recent flight experience requirements for operators who use the equipment, and the aircraft flown also will be required to meet additional airworthiness requirements.

“The final rule takes advantage of advanced vision capabilities, thereby achieving the Next Generation Air Transportation System (NextGen) goals of increasing access, efficiency, and throughput at many airports when low visibility is the limiting factor,” the FAA said. “Additionally, it enables EFVS operations in reduced visibilities on a greater number of approach procedure types while maintaining an equivalent level of safety.” The new rule will take effect March 13, 2017.

PRIVATIZING FLIGHT SERVICE SAVED MONEY, FACES NEW CHALLENGES

The FAA mostly met its cost-cutting goals with the 2005 privatization of its flight service stations, but the program faces a future with declining demand in which safety and efficiency must be ensured, according to a Department of Transportation **Inspector General's report**.

Users have “no significant complaints” about the safety or quality of services they receive—a turnaround from a rocky initial transition to flight service privatization, the report said.

The expiration date of the original contract with Lockheed Martin, now Leidos, passed in September 2015, but the FAA granted the company options that could continue the current program through September 2019.

The Office of the Inspector General made three recommendations to the FAA to help develop its future approach to providing flight services, and the FAA has concurred, the report said.

The recommendations focus on communicating changes in services, delivery methods, and timetables to airspace users; developing a list of FAA orders and oversight processes that will require modification; and creating a working oversight framework before the next contract is awarded by competitive bidding.

The report, conducted as an audit between June 2015 and September 2016, credited the FAA with saving approximately \$2.13 billion over 13 years by entering into the contract—about \$59 million less than initially estimated.

One of the ways the agency achieved the savings, the report said, was making “multiple methods available” to pilots and other users to provide input on the program. Included in the methods was the regular solicitation of feedback from AOPA by both the FAA and Lockheed Martin, it said.

The flight service specialists who have briefed generations of pilots about weather conditions and handled their flight plans could largely become a thing of the past under the future Flight Service Program—a matter the Inspector General characterized as incompletely resolved, and about which significant concerns have been noted.

According to the report, “Increased use of Web-based and other digital applications has significantly reduced the demand for services that flight service specialists provide. Consequently, for the next contract, FAA is considering phasing out most specialists and relying more on Web-based and other means to deliver services. However, the Agency has not yet made a final decision regarding these changes or developed corresponding oversight of the contractor and services to reflect the potential changes. As a result, FAA

may not have appropriate mechanisms in place to ensure the safety and efficiency of this important program for pilots.”

AOPA Vice President of Government Affairs Melissa Rudinger said a large-scale phase-out of specialists would not be justified.

“The removal of this safety critical position is not realistic given what we currently know and the additional questions that are not yet resolved that were identified jointly by the FAA and AOPA. There are significant safety and regulatory challenges that make this proposal problematic and that have failed to be addressed in prior studies by the FAA or over the past year of collaborative study,” she said.

User input—credited as having helped the FAA’s previous cost-savings effort—must play a significant future role as well.

Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays and Happy New Year to everyone.