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## Fact Sheet

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### For Immediate Release

March 24, 2006  
 Contact: Rebecca Trexler  
 Phone: (202) 267-3883

### Co-Located TRACONS (Terminal Radar Approach Control)

#### What is a TRACON?

TRACONS are FAA facilities that house air traffic controllers who use radar displays and radios to guide aircraft approaching and departing airports generally within a 30- to 50-mile radius up to 10,000 feet, as well as aircraft that may be flying over that airspace.

Once an aircraft that is landing is within five miles of an airport and below 2,500 feet, TRACON controllers hand the aircraft off to air traffic controllers in the airport tower.

When a departing aircraft leaves the TRACON's range of control, TRACON controllers hand responsibility for the aircraft off to controllers at FAA En Route Centers who guide the aircraft at higher altitudes while it is en route to the next airport.

In other words, while TRACON controllers do not handle landings and takeoffs like airport tower controllers, they are responsible for the safe separation of aircraft flying in the busy areas surrounding airports.

#### Where are TRACONS Located?

Some TRACONS are located on airport property and some are not, but their locations have no effect on TRACON controllers' ability to control

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aircraft, or on the capacity or capabilities of any airport. This is because TRACON controllers rely on radar displays and radio to separate aircraft, unlike tower controllers who control landings and takeoffs visually. In fact, TRACONs do not have windows — a darker environment makes it easier for controllers to see the radar screens.

The provision of TRACON services from remote locations is a common and time-tested practice. For instance, all aircraft flying in the New York City-metropolitan area receive services from one TRACON located on Long Island. The FAA also recently established the Potomac TRACON, which consolidated five different TRACONs into one located in Warrenton, VA. The Potomac TRACON now handles all air traffic flying in the Baltimore/Washington, D.C., area.

The FAA also operates TRACONs in both Northern and Southern California that both serve several airports each.

## **Why co-locate TRACONS?**

Generally, co-locating TRACONs where possible saves taxpayer money by eliminating the need for the FAA to have multiple buildings, automation systems, voice switches and all of the overhead associated with the TRACON infrastructure.

In some cases of co-location, the agency can provide more services to more locations with the same amount of money. In other cases, the agency can provide the same services it was providing, but at much less cost to taxpayers.

Savings can be invested into modernization efforts to increase the safety and capacity of the national airspace system.

The FAA's policy is to consider relocating a TRACON any time construction of a new airport traffic control tower is considered. The agency faces a significant backlog of terminal air traffic control facility replacement projects, and co-locating TRACONs where it makes sense will speed the process and save money. For instance, instead of installing a new terminal automation system in two different locations, the facilities could be co-located, taking advantage of the investment in one location without duplicating expenses in another.

There are other possible advantages as well. In some cases, locating a

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TRACON off of airport property frees up valuable space for airport expansion. In addition, many smaller TRACONS close at night because air traffic is not sufficient to justify the expense. Co-located TRACONS can provide services 24-hours a day.

## **What is the effect of co-location on controllers?**

Controllers do not lose their jobs as a result of a TRACON being moved.

When TRACONS are co-located, the controllers in those facilities are offered positions at the airport traffic control towers at their current locations, or at the new co-located TRACON. It is common for air traffic controllers to move several times during the course of a career with the FAA in order to accept promotions. At some co-located facilities, controllers can accept promotions without having to move.

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Federal Aviation Administration  
800 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20591  
1-866-TELL-FAA (1-866-835-5322)

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