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White Paper on Tuition Based Ab Initio Training Programs for Air Traffic Controllers

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WHITE PAPER
ON
TUITION-BASED, AB INITIO, TRAINING PROGRAMS
FOR AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS

Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University is proposing an evaluation to transform the legacy method for hiring and training air traffic controllers. This evaluation will examine a transition to a prospective employee-funded, tuition-based model, while reinvesting savings to create a state-of-the-art air traffic training center at the FAA Academy in Oklahoma City. Preliminary analysis indicates the FAA could repurpose approximately \$82K to \$174K per student, depending on the individual's training and aviation-related experience prior to employment as an air traffic control specialist. The annualized level of funding could be substantial, based on expected hiring of roughly 1,200 controllers each year for the next decade. The evaluation would contain provisions for continued FAA funding of eligible applicants to receive basic training for the air traffic control specialist position. The formal evaluation would also examine the placement directly to an FAA facility for applicants who are hired with prior academic or practical air traffic experience.

Based on this model, certified schools, similar to collegiate and *ab initio* pilot training institutions, would have the ability to offer more comprehensive training programs that meet or exceed the current basic training offered at the FAA Academy. Similar to pilot certificates, air traffic control graduates would be issued ATC certificates by FAA ATC designated examiners. The FAA would develop standards to certify air traffic control training centers at colleges and universities in a manner similar to what is done today for Part 141 Pilot Training Centers and establish a Designee program for Designated ATC Examiners to assist the FAA in certifying individuals. The continued professionalization and standardization of air traffic control training centers and the development of Designated ATC Examiners would allow the FAA to improve basic training for controllers through oversight of tuition based programs and repurpose existing internal resources to focus on development of advanced simulation training which is increasingly needed to ensure the proficiency of existing workforce and facilitate the integration of the Next Generation Air Transportation System (NEXTGEN) technology.

Third-party partners, professional associations or accreditation services, as well as experts in diversity, will help to develop and recruit qualified, diverse applicants. The dedicated professionals at the FAA, from the Academy, Headquarters, service areas and regional offices, and at each air traffic facility will continue to play influential roles in developing curriculum, standards, and learning outcomes for the next generation of controllers. Engaging different communities will drive training innovation, competition, and choices.

The evaluation would contain provisions for continued FAA funding of eligible applicants to receive basic training for the air traffic control specialist position. For those applicants who meet minimum qualifications and are not able to self-fund an educational program to bypass the basic training requirements, this concept would keep government-funded training opportunities available and help sustain and grow a more diverse workforce. The evaluation would also examine the placement of other applicants who arrive at the FAA with prior academic or practical air traffic experience, such as former military air traffic controllers, directly to an FAA facility

This proposal provides the FAA with the ability to select from a combination of Initial, Intermediate I, Intermediate II, and Advanced program graduates, as well as from those with prior air traffic experience, and they will enter training at a facility and will have certification time targets based on their experience and demonstrated skills, not a “one size fits all” approach. If advanced training under the *ab initio* concept reduces new hire certification training time to within a year at some of our high level facilities, the FAA stands to save approximately 76% in costs while the new hire achieves full performance level in roughly 32% of the time compared to the way training is conducted today. Lower-level facilities could also benefit from the proposed changes. If a candidate graduates from an Intermediate II *ab initio* program that provides all of the initial training currently done at the FAA Academy and some of the track-specific training that is covered as part of facility training today, the FAA could save up to 89% in costs while the new hire achieves full performance level in about 27% of the time compared to the way training is conducted today.

The evaluation will examine re-purposing the air traffic controller training portion of the FAA Academy to offer employees a cutting-edge, technologically developed institution that will prepare them for the skills needed in NextGen air traffic environment. Advanced simulation, technology-based training and self-learning programs will be geared to the way our future generations of controllers learn.

This preliminary business case indicates opportunity and benefit in pursuing this evaluation; therefore, we request legislation to develop the business case for *ab initio* air traffic controller training transformation and certification processes.

Proposed Legislative Language

Task- The Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration shall evaluate a transition to an *ab initio*, tuition-based model for training air traffic controllers and reinvest savings to create a state-of-the-art air traffic training center at the FAA Academy in Oklahoma City. The evaluation shall include continued FAA funding of eligible applicants to receive basic training for the air traffic control specialist position and a model for the placement directly to an FAA facility for air traffic controller applicants who are hired with appropriate academic or practical air traffic experience. The evaluation shall also include the development of standards to certify air traffic control training centers in a manner similar to what is done today for Part 141 Pilot Training Centers and establish a Designee program for Designated ATC Examiners.

Report- Not later than 180 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the Administrator shall submit to the Committee on _____ of the House of Representatives and the Committee on _____ of the Senate a report on the results of the evaluation.