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U.S. Transportation Secretary Sean P. Duffy Unveils New Package to Boost Air Traffic Controller Workforce

Thursday, May 1, 2025

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Transportation Secretary Sean P. Duffy today unveiled a new package of actions to further supercharge the air traffic controller workforce. The package will allow more of the best and brightest candidates to get into air traffic facilities and on the job faster, as well as increase retention of experienced controllers. Secretary Duffy first launched the [supercharge program](#) in February.

“In our first 100 days, this administration has made more progress on addressing the air traffic controller shortage than the last one did in four years.” said **U.S. Transportation Secretary Sean P. Duffy**. “But there’s more work to be done to secure our skies. Today’s actions will supercharge the air traffic controller workforce from both retention and hiring side of the equation – bringing us one step closer to reversing decades of staffing declines.”

“This new recruitment award and retention incentive program is a meaningful step toward addressing the ongoing staffing shortages in air traffic control across the National Airspace System,” said **National Air Traffic Controllers Association (NATCA) President Nick Daniels**. “We thank Secretary Duffy for his commitment to recruiting and retaining the best and brightest in the air traffic control profession and look forward to working with the Department of Transportation and the FAA on controller staffing, safety improvements, and the modernization of air traffic control systems and improvements to facility infrastructure.”

To retain existing experienced controllers, the FAA will:

- Offer a limited-time incentive package to keep experienced controllers from retiring.

To supercharge the hiring pipeline, the FAA will:

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- Provide new opportunities for veteran military controllers, including an expanded list of qualified facilities.
- Provide financial incentives to graduates and new hires for completing initial training milestones.
- Reward academy graduates who are assigned to hard-to-staff facilities.
- Ensure the best and brightest candidates aren't waiting for a year or more for routine medical and security clearances.
- Expand the number of instructors and establish a Learning Center at the Air Traffic Controller Academy in Oklahoma City.

The FAA is on track to hire at least 2,000 controllers this year following the March supercharged hiring campaign, which increased the starting salary for Academy trainees by 30 percent. Secretary Duffy streamlined hiring by changing the old 8-step hiring process at the FAA to a 5-step process. This has already shaved five months off the old hiring process, enabling the FAA to refer more than 8,320 candidates to take the aptitude exam, known as the Air Traffic Skills Assessment (ATSA).

Thousands of candidates have already taken the ATSA and moved into the next stage of the hiring process. Candidates from the March supercharged hiring campaign who scored the highest on the ATSA are given priority for the Academy.

“The supercharge hiring initiative is working,” said **Acting FAA Administrator Chris Rocheleau**. “Less than 45 days after the announcement closed, one of the first applicants already has an Academy start date in early June. This stellar work by our team to accelerate this process is a clear sign that this Administration is leading in a profound way to transform our aviation system.”

Additional Information:

Recruitment and Retention Incentive Package:

The FAA and National Air Traffic Controllers Association (NATCA) have agreed to a new limited-time incentive package to recruit and retain controllers.

- \$5,000 award for academy graduates who successfully completed the initial qualification training
- \$5,000 award for new hires who successfully complete the initial qualification training
- \$10,000 award for academy graduates who are assigned to one of 13 hard-to-staff air traffic facilities
- Certified professional controllers eligible to retire but under the mandatory retirement age (56) will receive a lump sum payment of 20 percent of their basic pay for each year they continue to work

Additional Actions to Supercharge Air Traffic Hiring Pipeline:

To get these qualified candidates into the Academy faster, the FAA is now putting additional resources into the medical and security clearance phase, such as retaining the services of additional qualified medical personnel, including those who can perform psychological evaluations.

At the Academy, former controllers are instructors. However, to handle the hiring surge the FAA will use additional expert educators and teaching assistants to supplement the existing controller instructors for classroom instruction.

Teaching assistants will conduct classroom training for Air Traffic Basics and teach content in Initial Qualification training. Adult educators will be primary instructors and paired with a certified professional controller for subject matter expertise in the classroom.

Training for this career is extremely demanding, on average 57 to 73 percent of trainees graduate, depending on their training path. To better ensure successful learning outcomes for trainees, the Academy will establish a Learning Center in June to provide additional help to any student. The FAA is developing a plan to use more innovative learning technologies, including mobile training apps.

Bolstering the teaching cadre also means more jobs in the Oklahoma City region.

Once trainees graduate from the Academy, they'll be assigned to one of the 313 FAA facilities across the country, where they'll work with experienced air traffic controllers toward their certification.

The FAA is also offering more opportunities for experienced military controllers to join the workforce. Using On-the-Spot hiring authority, veteran controllers will bypass the normal announcement process. Air Traffic managers will be able to directly accept resumes from interested military controllers and help place them at their preferred location. Veteran controllers will also be given a preferred list of facilities to work at, including larger facilities that command more pay. This list includes TRACONs Level 9 and below, Combined Tower/TRACONs Level 9 and below, and Towers Level 8 and below.

To get more controllers directly into facilities, the Trump Administration has also bolstered the [Enhanced Air Traffic Collegiate Training Initiative \(AT-CTI\)](#). These schools provide the same thorough curriculum and advanced training technology offered at the Academy. After graduating, students can report directly to an FAA facility to begin their on-the-job training.

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