

New Dulles Tower Operational

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July 16 - The most visible change to the Dulles International Airport skyline in nearly half a century came alive early Sunday morning as air traffic controllers began guiding planes from the airport's new air traffic control tower.

At around 6 a.m. yesterday, the ATO commissioned the new tower, which rises 325 feet over suburban Washington, D.C.

"When it's clear, you can see forever," says Sherelle Carper, Dulles tower manager.

The new tower is nearly twice as tall as its predecessor, which will be maintained by the airport for its architectural notoriety as part of Eero Saarinen's forward-thinking terminal design.

The tower cab boasts 850 square feet of floor space and "looks twice as big as the old tower," according to Carper.

The increase in size created plenty of space for the equipment that had to be crammed in the old tower cab, which was opened in 1962 before most of the current air traffic control interfaces were available.

Two new air traffic control positions are also available in the new tower – a third local control position and a position dedicated to handling Class D airspace around the airport. And more space has been allocated for the tower supervisor, who had worked in cramped quarters in the old facility.



The new air traffic control tower at Washington Dulles International Airport rises above its predecessor.

Photo: MWAA

Aside from the improved view and the increase in floor space, the new tower features an Enhanced Terminal Voice Switching system, which wasn't available in the old facility. The ETVS allows controllers to switch between all available radio frequencies using a touch screen. **It also has an Integrated Control and Monitoring System that handles all of the airports visual and navigational aids through a single piece of equipment with a touch screen.**

The tower is also on much better real estate for observing the airport. It sits between the airport's two parallel runways and just off the end of its crosswind runway, giving controllers a commanding view of aircraft movements all over the airport surface.

Before it officially opened, controllers spent time in the new tower becoming familiar with its layout and equipment. Carper even held all-hands meetings in the tower cab so controllers could give their input on last minute modifications such as moving cables that might block lines of sight.



The new tower boasts tremendous views of the airport. Photo: MWAA

The new tower is part of an ambitious "D2" overhaul project at Dulles that aims to prepare the airport for continued air traffic growth. The project includes the completion of a fourth runway in November 2008, as well as numerous improvements to the terminals and the construction of a fifth runway sometime in the future.

Airport and FAA officials considered lines of sight to the two new runways when they were deciding on the location of the new tower.

Dulles airport, the first in the country built for commercial jet traffic, has operated with the original air traffic control tower and three runways since it first opened in 1962.

"The Airports Authority was pleased to construct the new tower for the FAA," said James Bennett, Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority president and CEO. "And we are very appreciative of all the work those who operate within tower do to ensure that Dulles International can continue to fulfill its role as a major gateway to the nation's capital."