

Government to build new \$160m air traffic tower at Sangster Airport

MONTEGO BAY, St James - A new air traffic tower is to be built at Sangster International Airport, a \$160 million facility that will rise almost twice as high as its replacement, says Transport and Works Minister Robert Pickersgill.

"Recent increases in traffic levels and the demand for the airport will render the existing facility inadequate, and so we will build a new one," Pickersgill told the Observer, a day after air traffic controllers went public with complaints that new construction at the airport was impeding full view of the runway.

The project is to be implemented in the new year. The existing tower is over 40 years old and inappropriate for the expanding airport, Jamaica's largest, said the transport minister.

Its replacement will be built about 40 metres high, almost twice the height of the existing facility, which, he said, should solve the problem of visibility.

"We have already completed the site selection process and the planning process ... from as far back as 2003," Pickersgill said.

On Wednesday, Howard Greaves, president of the Jamaica Air Traffic Controllers (JATC) said a new wing constructed at the airport was impeding the vision of air traffic controllers, making it impossible to guarantee safety at the eastern end of the airport.

Pickersgill said he was aware of the air traffic controllers' concern, and that the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has been in dialogue with the air traffic controllers to address the matter.

"The authority has issued interim operational procedures to the controllers to address the immediate concerns and these procedures involved the pilots, ground handlers, as well as the controllers in an effort to ensure safe operations," he said.

Noting that it is the intention of the government to keep the controllers happy, Pickersgill said yesterday the replacement tower would offer more comfortable working conditions.

"The new facility will boast full visibility of approaches and the manoeuvring area, a new console capable of accommodating the various radar displays and monitors, and equipment in what is described as an aesthetically pleasing unit," he told the Observer.

The tower will also sport "an appropriate lounge area with lockers, television, sofas, kitchenette to make the air traffic controllers comfortable."

The transport ministry has already acquired some of the equipment for the new tower, said the minister. However, he did not provide details.

**Jamaica Observer
Friday, December 30, 2005**