

May 13, 2025

The Honorable Sean Duffy
Secretary of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Duffy,

I am extremely alarmed by recent reports of several air traffic radar and communications outages in the past two weeks that left aircraft approaching Newark Liberty International Airport flying blind. These outages drastically increase the risk of a mid-air collision and undermine public confidence in the safety of our nation's airspace. I urge you to take every necessary step to expeditiously end these dangerous technology blackouts and ensure that our airspace, especially the congested New York City area, is managed at all times with the highest safety standards that Americans expect and deserve.

The circumstances surrounding each of the recent air traffic control outages underscores the gravity of these significant failures. On Sunday, May 11, the Philadelphia Terminal Radar Approach Control (TRACON), which manages the airspace surrounding Newark, experienced "a telecommunications issue" that forced the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to issue a 45-minute ground stop for all aircraft departing Newark.¹ This is the third major air traffic control incident at the same facility to interrupt Newark controllers in the past two weeks. At approximately 3:55 a.m. last Friday, May 9, a 90-second blackout of air traffic control communications and radar occurred at the Philadelphia TRACON, blinding controllers guiding aircraft around Newark.² On April 28, 2025, at approximately 1:27 p.m., radio and radar contact between air traffic controllers in the Philadelphia TRACON facility suddenly went dark for approximately 90 seconds.³ Reports indicate that similar such outages have interrupted air traffic control at the same facility at least twice before the April 28 blackout.⁴

¹ Statement, Fed. Aviation Admin. (May 11, 2025), <https://www.faa.gov/newsroom/faq-statements-newark-liberty-international-airport>; Equipment issue at Newark airport causes FAA to issue brief ground stop, WABC News (May 11, 2025), <https://abc7ny.com/post/newark-liberty-international-airport-problems-another-equipment-outage-causes-faa-issue-brief-ground-stop/16384068/>.

² *Radar screens went black for air traffic controllers at Newark airport again*, WABC News (May 9, 2025), <https://abc7ny.com/post/newark-airport-problems-gottheimer-call-atc-system-reform-cancellations-delays/16365308/>.

³ Allyson Versprille & Siddharth Philip, *Inside Newark Airport's Chilling 90-Second Blackout*, BLOOMBERG (May 6, 2025), <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2025-05-06/curses-and-tears-newark-airport-s-chilling-90-second-blackout>.

⁴ E.g., Tom Costello, Jay Blackman & Corky Siemaszko, *Newark air traffic control lost contact with pilots at least twice before, source says*, NBC NEWS (May 6, 2025), <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/newark-air-traffic-control-lost-contact-pilots-least-twice-source-says-rcna205126>.

Not only do these blackouts threaten the safety of thousands of fliers, they also create significant stress for our air traffic controllers. According to reports, when the first sudden outage took place, “[c]ontrollers braced for tragedy and destruction that some worried they’d be helpless to prevent, according to accounts of people familiar with the events. One person described workers in the room letting out curses and frustrated cries.”⁵ One air traffic controller on duty that day described the outage as “the most dangerous situation you could have.”⁶ As a result of that outage, some controllers have taken trauma leave, and hundreds of flights at Newark have been delayed or cancelled.⁷ During Friday’s outage, reports described air traffic controllers “telling a FedEx plane that their screens went dark and then asked them to tell their company to put pressure on to get the problem fixed.”⁸

It goes without saying that there is no room for these kinds of failures in our air traffic control system, which we rely on to safely guide thousands of flights every day. The Newark air traffic control blackouts must be addressed immediately, and your recent air traffic control announcements and attempts to assign blame to the previous administration do not reflect the urgency and gravity of the situation.⁹

As the FAA considers next steps and meets with airlines tomorrow, I demand you and the FAA swiftly take every possible action to ensure air traffic controllers in Newark and around the country can remain in constant radar and radio contact with all aircraft under their control. If no immediate repairs or redundant fail-safes are possible at Newark, you should consider further limiting air traffic or selectively and temporarily closing certain airspace until such time as the highest safety standards can be assured. You must also ensure back-up systems are in place and equipment is upgraded not just at Newark but across the United States.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

cc: Mr. Chris Rocheleau
Acting Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ Pete Munteen, Rene Marsh, TuAhn Dam, Amanda Musa, *Newark Airport systems outage was ‘most dangerous situation,’ air traffic controller says*, CNN (May 7, 2025), <https://www.cnn.com/2025/05/07/us/newark-airport-outage-system-scrutiny>.

⁷ Michael Levenson, Mark Walker, Christine Hauser, & Christine Chung, *Controllers Briefly Lost Contact With Planes at Newark Last Week, Union Official Says*, N.Y. TIMES (May 5, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/05/nyregion/newark-airport-delays-disruptions-issues.html>.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ Press Release, Fed. Aviation Admin., U.S. Transportation Secretary Sean P. Duffy Unveils Plan to Build Brand New, State-of-the-Art Air Traffic Control System (May 8, 2025), <https://www.faa.gov/newsroom/us-transportation-secretary-sean-p-duffy-unveils-plan-build-brand-new-state-art-air>.