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Subject: 7.29.2025 Rep. Dingell Follow up Letter to FAA on DTW Airport Landing Approach
Attachments: 7.29.2025 Rep. Dingell Follow up Letter to FAA on DTW Airport Landing Approach.pdf

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Hi all – please find Rep. Dingell's follow-up letter to the Administrator attached regarding DTW's landing approach. Thank you,



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July 29, 2025

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The Honorable Bryan Bedford
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Administrator Bedford:

I am writing to follow up on my December 5, 2024 letter regarding the Instrument Landing System Yankee (ILS-Y) approach at Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport (DTW).¹ To date, I have not received a response, and the serious safety concerns I raised remain unresolved.

Despite repeated warnings from whistleblowers, investigators, and the U.S. Office of Special Counsel (OSC), there have been reports that indicate DTW has resumed use of the ILS-Y offset localizer procedure as of July 28, 2025. I have reviewed an internal memo outlining controller instructions for this approach, and the guidance raises more questions than it answers. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is knowingly reinstating an approach procedure that has been found to present unacceptable safety risks, which is deeply troubling to me.

As you know, the ILS-Y procedure was discontinued in 2015 because of its inherent risks, specifically the well-documented signal interference caused when taxiing aircraft cross critical areas. These safety issues remain unresolved, as no new information has been presented to demonstrate that the procedure is safe. There is no scenario on Runway 22R at DTW in which aircraft can avoid crossing these zones. When they do cross through the critical zone, the localizer signal is disrupted, leaving pilots on final approach with unreliable guidance at the moment when precision is most critical.

Instead of implementing safer alternatives, FAA has returned to a procedure that was deemed unsafe more than a decade ago. This decision is even more concerning given the availability of modern approaches, which are widely used nationwide and provide safer, more resilient guidance.² The refusal by local tower leadership to employ these alternatives unnecessarily puts both pilots and passengers at risk.

¹ Congresswoman Debbie Dingell. *Dingell Requests Answers From FAA About Landing System Concerns At DTW*. 5 Dec. 2024. Retrieved from: <https://debbiedingell.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=5355>.

² "Guide to Aviation Approaches: Types and Technologies Explained." *Aviation Hunt*. 6 Nov. 2024. Retrieved from: <https://www.aviationhunt.com/aviation-approaches/>.

Since my previous correspondence, several developments have only heightened my concerns:

- The tragic January 29, 2025, mid-air collision near Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA) that killed 67 people, where an FAA controller was reportedly performing two critical functions simultaneously.³
- A growing pattern of near mid-air collisions nationwide, with independent reviews documenting an increase in close-call incidents at major airports, driven by controller staffing shortages, runway congestion, and operational strain.^{[4][5]}
- An internal DTW memo directing that local tower positions be combined during peak arrival periods, in direct conflict with FAA staffing guidance.⁶

These facts point to systemic problems in FAA staffing, oversight, and safety culture that remain unaddressed. Further, the United States Senate and the Department of Transportation's Office of Inspector General (OIG) have both found that FAA's Office of Audit and Evaluation failed to maintain documentation, conduct impartial reviews, or implement meaningful reforms.^{[7][8]} The OSC has been equally clear that FAA's conclusions regarding the ILS-Y procedure "do not appear reasonable."⁹ These findings erode confidence in FAA's ability to ensure the highest level of safety.

In light of recent reports that the FAA has resumed use of the ILS-Y approach at DTW, I request a detailed response to the following questions by Monday, August 4, 2025:

- Please confirm whether the ILS-Y approach is currently in use at DTW, and if so, when was it reinstated and under what conditions?

³ Baldor, L., Copp, T., Gomez Licon, A., and Skene, L. "Midair collision kills 67 people in the deadliest US air disaster in almost a quarter century." *Associated Press*. 31 Jan. 2025. Retrieved from: <https://www.ap.org/news-highlights/spotlights/2025/midair-collision-kills-67-people-in-the-deadliest-us-air-disaster-in-almost-a-quarter-century/>

⁴ Ember, S. and Steel, E. "Airline Close Calls Happen Far More Often Than Previously Known." *New York Times*. 21 Aug. 2023. Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2023/08/21/business/airline-safety-close-calls.html>.

⁵ Shah, S. "D.C. Plane Crash Puts Spotlight on History of 'Near Misses' in the U.S." *Time*. 30 Jan. 2025. Retrieved from: <https://time.com/7211750/dc-plane-crash-near-misses-faa-history/>

⁶ Experts note that combining positions under these conditions increases the likelihood of frequency congestion, confusion between pilots, and loss of situational awareness during simultaneous approaches.

⁷ United States Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation. *Committee Investigation Report: Aviation Safety Oversight*. Dec. 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.commerce.senate.gov/services/files/FFDA35FA-0442-465D-AC63-5634D9D3CEF6>.

⁸ United States Department of Transportation Office of Inspector General. *FAA's Office of Audit and Evaluation Adheres to Investigative Practice Standards but Lacks Comprehensive Standard Operating Procedures*. Report No. PT2023013. 25 Jan. 2023. Retrieved from: <https://www.oig.dot.gov/library-item/39264>.

⁹ United States Office of Special Counsel. *Air Traffic Control OSC Letter DI-21-000698*. 3 Dec. 2024. Retrieved from: https://osc.gov/Documents/Public%20Files/FY25/DI-21-000698/OSC%20File%20No.%20DI-21-000698%3B%20Letter%20to%20the%20President_Redacted.pdf.