

Air Traffic Controllers Prepare for Super Bowl Weekend Traffic Surge

NEW YORK / NEW JERSEY – As the Denver Broncos and the Seattle Seahawks prepare for the big game this Sunday, air traffic controllers in the New York / New Jersey metropolitan area are preparing as well.

Air traffic controllers and other safety professionals represented by NATCA throughout the region are ready to continue a massive team effort this weekend that began earlier this week, ensuring a safe, efficient and seamless event in some of the nation's tightest and most dense airspace.

"It's already a very small and complex airspace, and now you have this added layer of volume," says New York Terminal Radar Approach Control (TRACON) NATCA Facility Representative Dean Iacopelli. "We're trying to maximize the airspace and minimize the delays, and also have procedures in place to be as best prepared for this event as we can."

The FAA and NATCA have worked collaboratively to develop a plan for the increase of traffic, using the experiences and lessons learned from previous Super Bowl locations and factoring those in with the complexities of the New York metropolitan area airspace. They have also added extra staff to the schedules for today through Monday night (Feb. 3), however, Iacopelli explains that just because extra staff is on hand, that does not mean the number of planes handled can be increased exponentially.

"The bottom line is the [National Airspace] system can only handle so many more planes," he says. "If we add 50 staff, we can't add 10 times the amount of planes."

Caldwell, Farmingdale, Islip, Morristown, Newark, Teterboro, and Westchester Towers as well as New York TRACON and New York Air Route Traffic Control Center are all expecting to be the most heavily impacted by the surge of traffic.

Controllers at New York TRACON, located in Westbury, N.Y., on Long Island, handle flights between a tower and New York Center; they facilitate departures transitioning from the airport to the Center environment and then take the aircraft from the Center environment and line them up in sequence to land at an airport. The TRACON controllers will not only be handling the air carrier flights for John F. Kennedy International Airport, LaGuardia and Newark Airports, but also flights heading to and from Philadelphia International Airport and the general aviation airports in the New York Metropolitan area, including Teterboro, Westchester County and Islip.

With MetLife Stadium only two miles south of Teterboro Airport, air traffic controllers have already started seeing an influx of traffic. The airport can accommodate up to 700 airplanes and most of the spots are already booked.

"We are staffing at full capacity; we have all controllers on duty and plan to have them work overtime. Our membership here at Teterboro Tower has been working tirelessly in

preparation for the big game,” says Teterboro Tower NATCA Facility Representative Edmund Granton. “It truly has been a team effort, with a lot of collaboration among NATCA, FAA and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. We’re all working towards a common goal, and we want to make that happen as safely, as efficiently and as productively as possible.”

At Newark, controllers are expecting an increase in traffic although it will be limited due to an hourly cap. There is very limited general aviation parking and the tower expects possibly 30 to 40 extra overnight aircraft, according to Newark NATCA Facility Representative Ray Adams.

“The bigger impact on the airport will be airspace saturation,” Adams said. “Teterboro and Morristown are each located about 10 miles from Newark and share the same airspace and area of New York TRACON. Their traffic is predicted to skyrocket. The resulting saturation may cause delays at EWR.”

The FAA has increased staffing at Newark in the days leading up to the game and will do so after the game. “We are staffing our midnight shift on Sunday night with extra controllers, a traffic management coordinator and a supervisor.”

Farmingdale Tower NATCA Facility Representative Mark Abbey says the tower is normally staffed from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m., but for the Super Bowl there will be staff working a midnight shift Sunday into Monday morning.

“We also worked out some new procedures with New York TRACON to expedite handling of instrument flight rules (IFR) traffic,” he says. “It is being handled as professionally as it could be, and it’s quite the collaborative effort.”

###