

(December 30, 2006) Officials urge FAA to hurry up backup radar

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Two weeks after the primary radar at O'Hare International Airport shut down twice in one day, Illinois officials are urging the Federal Aviation Administration to install a backup system earlier than planned.

In a letter sent Thursday to FAA Administrator Marion Blakey, members of the state's congressional delegation say that failures like the one that occurred Dec. 15 will continue until the backup system is installed.

Equipment needed for the second radar is scheduled for installation in late 2008 -- but state officials say the airport can't wait.

"It is astounding that Atlanta and Dallas-Ft. Worth have multiple radars to cover for catastrophic failures on site, but FAA does not believe O'Hare should be given similar consideration," the letter said.

U.S. Sens. Dick Durbin and Barack Obama signed the letter, as did U.S. Reps. Daniel Lipinski and Jerry Costello. Costello is expected to be named chairman of the House Aviation Subcommittee in January.

O'Hare's Airport Surveillance Radar 9 stopped operating twice on Dec. 15, delaying many flights at one of the nation's busiest airports, officials said. The airport used a backup system in Tinley Park while the FAA worked on the problem.

O'Hare only has one on-site radar system, though the FAA plans to install a second as part of the \$15 billion expansion project.

FAA spokeswoman Elizabeth Isham Cory said Thursday that the agency isn't planning to change its timetable.

"We are evaluating the request. At this time the FAA has no plans to move from what we are doing at O'Hare in terms of coordinating installation of the new equipment with the construction on the airfield," she said.