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Saab and LFV sign contract for remote air traffic control

Defence and security company Saab will install an air traffic control system at Sundsvall and Örnsköldsvik airports, making it possible to control the air traffic at both airports from one single air traffic control centre. The contract is a breakthrough order for Saab, who is also the first in the world to deliver such a system.

The system is expected to be installed and tested in 2011 and to become operational in 2011/2012. Air traffic at Sundsvall and Örnsköldsvik airports will then be controlled from a joint air traffic control centre located in Sundsvall.

“Not only is this Saab's first contract for this solution, it is also the first system of this type to be put into operation anywhere in the world,” says Per Ahl, Sales manager for Saab's air traffic control solutions. “It is fantastic that Sweden managed to be first in the world with this. It demonstrates our ability to bring together industry and users in order to create change in a global operating environment.”

“The development of remotely operated towers is an example of Swedish engineering and technology at the forefront. LFV and Saab have developed technology that is not only of national concern, but also of great importance internationally. Remote towers are a step towards more efficient air traffic, in a time where this business faces high demands for rationalisation,” says Rolf Norman, Technical director, LFV.

The solution for remote air traffic control, which was developed by Saab with LFV as operating partner, was unveiled to the outside world in spring 2009 after extensive and successful testing in tough environments at the airports in Ängelholm and Malmö. The system enables air traffic at small and medium-sized airports to be led from a shared air traffic control centre. This reduces costs while increasing efficiency and security.

“This is ultimately a question of survival for smaller airports outside the major cities,” says Per Ahl. “Air traffic is unevenly distributed throughout the day, with single peaks when the workload is greater. Instead of keeping several air traffic control towers open, resources can be co-located. With fewer air traffic control towers, you can also invest more in modern technology that helps air traffic controllers at the tower being used.”



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Remote air traffic control – how it works

Cameras and sensors are installed at the airports, and everything they record is linked in real time over to the air traffic control centre and projected into a 360 degree view. At the air traffic control centre, the controller monitors and controls air traffic just as if they were sitting in a normal air traffic control tower. Safety has top priority, and modern technology actually improves safety in a number of ways:

- The cameras can record changes in the image, meaning that dangers such as unauthorised vehicles or objects on the runway are detected more easily. Using the cameras, the air traffic controller can also record what is happening in the sky and around the airport and then review this retrospectively in the event of an incident.
- A camera with automatic tracking can zoom in up to 36 times, replacing the traditional binoculars in a normal air traffic control tower.
- A video tracking function automatically detects incoming aircraft and marks them on the screen so that the controller can follow them more easily, even in poor visibility.
- The runway contours, buildings and other objects at the airport can be marked on the screens, ensuring that the controller can see them even in bad visibility.
- Images from the zoom camera, radar and weather information are integrated with the 360 degree view that is continuously monitored by the air traffic controller. This function can be compared to the head-up display in for example the Gripen fighter aircraft, and means that the air traffic controller does not have to look or focus elsewhere.

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