

Topic: Commonwealth Economic Development Issues "Airports"

Transportation Hearing at Martinsburg Airport Feb. 17, 1998

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Airport Background:

Greensburg Jeannette Regional Airport [Identifier 5G8 on the Detroit sectional chart] is located approximately 30 mi. due east of Greater Pitt and 10 miles West of Latrobe Airports. Formally called Pgh-Boquet Airpark was established as a privately-owned public use airport in 1969. From 1969 through the mid 1980,s the airport was extremely active and at various times was the home of 50 to 60 private airplanes, several flying Clubs and an airplane dealership. Local manufacturers used the airport for dropoff of small airfreight parcels. A 1986 study by the South-western Pa. Regional Planning Commission [SPRPC] indicated that this Airport contributed an estimated \$386,000 to the economy of the region in 1985. The SPRPC estimated that local and itinerant landings and takeoffs totaled 19,500 in 1986.

Throughout the 1980,s although the airport remained very active, its condition gradually declined. Other interests apparently did not permit the owner to put adequate funding back into the Airport to maintain its condition. The only time State funding was requested, received and applied to surface rehabilitation was in 1988 and the resulting repairs were minimal. In late 1990 in reaction to rumors that the airport was being purchased for a housing development, numerous airplanes and pilots and the operating FBO left the Airport. The purchase by a developer never materialized. Although the property owner expressed interest to continue its use as an airport, little funding was directed toward its maintenance. Fuel tanks were pulled and its condition continued to go downhill. A core group of dedicated pilots managed and maintained the airport as best they could to keep it alive until a new owner purchased it in early 1992.

The new owner Mr. Richard King is committed even to this present day despite increased nearby housing construction and lucrative offers to sell off the land, to keep the airport operating and re-develop it back and beyond its peak status of the 1970,s. Mr. King immediately made improvements by paving the half-mile entrance road. But later in December of the same year 1992 a severe setback to progress and plans was experienced by way of a heavy two-foot snowfall accumulation causing nearly all of the T-hangers and a Maintenance hanger at the airport to collapse destroying 14 aircraft and much personal property. Insurance provided means for replacement of some of the aircraft but insurance was not nearly enough to construct quality up-to-date hangers. But the airport continued to live on with tie-downs but still no-fuel. State funding provided the means for a 1994 Runway widening and repaving project and 1995 followed with another grant for a partial taxiway construction. Thanks to Penn Dot and the Bureau of Aviation the condition at Boquet was improving. 1996 came with some more bad news which has the future of the airport in Limbo until something is resolved. Allegheny Power Co. plans to put a High Tension Power-Transmission line approximately 100 feet from the south end of runway sticking up over 100 feet into Final Approach air space. The Owner has been able at considerable legal expense to stave off the Utility Company and hopefully get a court to help us out of this encroachment that will obviously effect operations at this airport. We must say at this time the Bureau of Aviation has helped by securing a verbal agreement by the Power Company to ground bury a portion of the power line.

One can see with this short history of a typical small private airport why would any businessman want to invest time and money into a venture like this where progress is slow, battles are many and profits low, if at all. Its no wonder why on an average one small airport closes its doors at least every week. Last year a nearby grass Airstrip in our area fell to housing development. These airports will never be rebuilt and none will take their place. Only the love of aviation would

keep someone involved in airport ownership.

We are here to share Economic Issues at Airports. I believe we all agree that Airports large or small are part of a bigger picture of Transportation in our State, just as important as Roads, Rails or Waterways. Only as healthy as this system is so is the rest of our Economy. Large Airports as I see play an important role in getting many goods and customers to their needed destinations, also providing much employment and revenue deserving of adequate funding. Small airports also provide a great service too. It's where that young would-be airline pilot gets his or her first airplane ride. A Day Care group's children get to touch a real airplane, the Civil Air Patrol has a home base or a Med Vac Helicopter is based closer to a dangerous Highway. County and city government and the FAA seem to be steering towards privatisation of their airports, so I do not see much desire to get involved with our size air fields. So it usually falls to the hands of an entrepreneur who has the guts and fortitude to undertake this kind of Capitalistic venture. That's why I would encourage the Commonwealth help us with our revenue-generating projects such as Hangers Fuel or even Industrial sites. That would help airports like ours get on our feet to be self-sustaining, creating income to help ourselves. State grants have been invaluable in our basic needs for runway and taxiway improvements but money for day-to-day needs have not come from these areas. I would suggest low or no interest loans to help construct Hangers or install Fuel Depots and also tax incentives to stimulate private development at small regional airports.

In closing I would say although Private-owned Public-access airports are just that Private. So profits ultimately benefit individuals. But I hope that does not stop us as taxpayers as a Commonwealth as public servers to support these small businessmen and women and give them more support to fulfill a dream that benefits us all. Thank You.