

## Chamber weighs in on airport annexation

By Matthew van Buren

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The Taos County Chamber of Commerce has announced its support for the town of Taos' proposed annexation of the Taos Regional Airport.

According to an email the Chamber circulated Tuesday (March 5), the organization would like to see the town act to annex the airport in order to secure funding for the \$24 million expansion, including a new crosswind runway. The town anticipates having to find \$1.2 million to fulfill its 5-percent match for the project, and it has proposed annexation as a way to recoup funds through gross-receipts tax (GRT) collections on the construction and into the future. In its email, the Chamber notes that GRT revenue generated through construction will be "substantial" and could go toward debt service.

"The Chamber supports the town of Taos' efforts to create jobs and generate construction activity through airport expansion," the email states. "It is the Chamber's position that the town endeavors to act responsibly in its borrowing capacity in order to generate this important economic activity and should act within its legal authority to annex the land it already owns in and around the Taos Regional Airport in order to secure repayment of any monies it borrows to expand the airport."

Taos County leaders have voiced opposition to the proposed annexation, largely saying they are concerned about the possibility of future annexations along Highway 64 and subsequent loss of GRTs.

Chamber chairman Brad Malone said in a phone interview the organization's stance reflects its role as a business advocacy group. He said the airport expansion is of paramount importance to the business community, and the town must take action in the near future or risk losing state and federal funds for the project.

"We need jobs," he said.

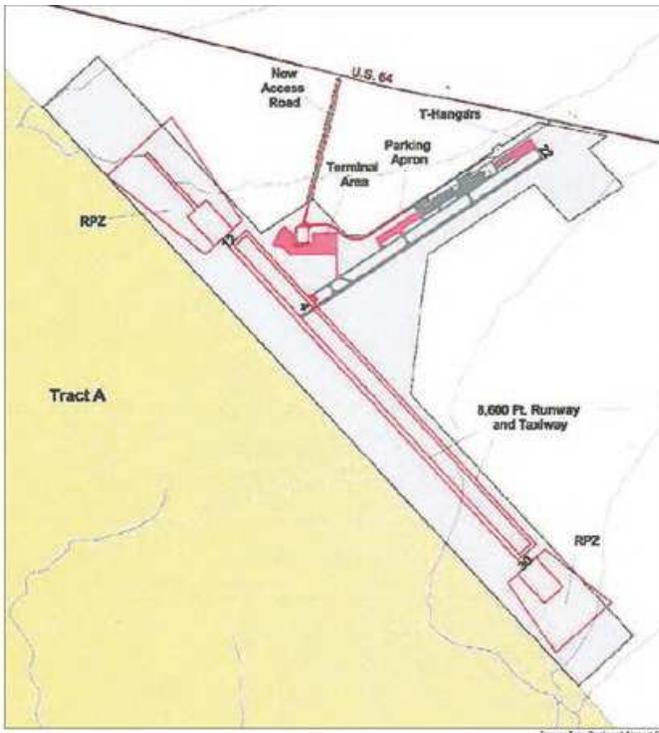
When asked about the county's concerns regarding future annexations, Malone said the Taos community should not "what-if ourselves to death."

"That doesn't have anything to do with the airport," he said of the possibility of subsequent annexations.

Malone praised the Town Council, saying in his personal opinion the councilors are fulfilling their duties as leaders and "sticking their necks out for us."

“Things have to be done, and they’re doing those things,” he said.

Town manager Oscar Rodriguez said he was pleased that the Chamber voiced its support for annexation and recognizes the importance of the airport as a regional economic driver. “It’s more good news,” he said. “It’s great to see the Chamber weigh in on things like this.”



Source: Taos Regional Airport EIS

**A diagram showing the proposed expansion at the Taos Regional Airport. The future runway (outlined in red) would allow pilots to land regardless of the direction the wind is blowing.**