



THE TAOS NEWS

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Airport expansion takes first step forward

By J.R. Logan

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The town of Taos has hired a contractor to do planning work on a proposed expansion of the Taos Regional Airport.

Armstrong Consultants, Inc. of Grand Junction, Colo., won an \$836,000 contract to do design and engineering work on an extension of an existing runway and the construction of another runway meant to improve safety at the airport.

The contract approved at a meeting Tuesday (Sept. 24) is the first step in the expansion of the airport. Most of the contract cost is covered by a grant from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

The town has been seeking the runway expansion for several years but was stymied by opposition from Taos Pueblo, which feared that the expansion would increase air traffic over its lands. The town managed to reach an agreement with the Pueblo, and the recent approval of a final Environmental Impact Statement has allowed the town to move forward with the project.

The entire project is expected to cost about \$24 million. The FAA is providing a \$23 million grant, but the town must come up with a \$1.4 million match in order to receive funding.

Earlier this year, the town said it did not have the enough cash to cover the match. In March, the town voted to annex the airport as well as six miles of highway right of way required to keep the town boundaries contiguous. By bringing the airport into the town boundaries, town officials said they hoped to capture gross receipts tax revenue from construction to be able to cover its match costs.

Taos County voiced ardent opposition to the annexation and filed two lawsuits to stop it. Litigation is working its way through district court in Taos.