



State offers help to cover costs for airport expansion

By J.R. Logan

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An email from the state Aviation Division suggests the town may get a break on what it will be asked to pay to finish a runway expansion project at the Taos Regional Airport. The offer could come in handy if the town is unable to come with future match payments to receive a federal grant.

A Feb. 18, 2013 email from Jane Lucero, Airport Development Administrator for the New Mexico Aviation Division, says the state normally splits the match cost with the local government 50/50. However, she said the Taos airport project could get more support from the state because it's a priority. The email was sent to airport manager John Thompson.

"This is an important project to the Town as well as the State of New Mexico and because of that, the State Aviation Division will be happy to sit down with the Town to discuss the State covering a higher percentage of the [match]," Lucero wrote.

Thompson forwarded the email to then-town manager Oscar Rodriguez, noting the state would want "hard numbers related to what we are able to fund" when negotiations started.

Thompson told *The Taos News* the town never formally asked the state to cover more of the costs because it was able to cobble together its match. "It's a nice offer, but we have to be honest with them," Thompson said.

Since the beginning of 2013, town officials have said they've struggled to find cash to cover its full match amount. The town council tried to annex the airport in March last year hoping to collect tax revenue from the construction project to put toward the match. The annexation was reversed by a district court judge in Taos late last year, and it is still unclear how the town plans to pay for the second half of the airport project.

Two new council members, Fritz Hahn and Judi Cantu, and new mayor Dan Barrone have all said they'd like to approach Taos County about sharing the cost of the match to ensure the project goes forward.

At its meeting March 11, the town council approved a \$486,000 match to go toward the first phase of the construction project. The grant application noted that the town was paying 50 percent of the match for that phase.

The previous town council had set aside \$350,000 for the match. The new council transferred the remaining \$136,000 from excess tax revenue not yet earmarked for another project.