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My Turn

Airport: So why is it coming up again?

Thomas French

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Taos Regional Airport expansion has been halted numerous times through public opinion, including strong opposition from Taos Pueblo, in the past two decades. I am wondering what has changed.

Ask yourselves, who of you reading this article owns or flies an airplane from Taos Regional Airport? Therefore, who will benefit from the airport expansion? And importantly, who will pay for it?

The obvious answers are that the only people who will benefit are those who own or fly airplanes. Regarding who will pay for it, it will be the general public. Why should the general public be paying for an airport expansion that will benefit only a few people who fly to and from Taos in airplanes?

For those of you who are new as well as those who have lived here all your lives, there have been very few accidents at Taos Regional Airport throughout its history. I have lived in Taos for over 30 years and remember only one airplane accident near the airport where Richard Rosen, a neighbor, flew up to Taos after being advised in Santa Fe not to do so because of inclement weather conditions. He arrived over Taos Regional Airport and could not land, not because of the existing runway, but because the airport was unmanned and the lights were off. He called for 45 minutes trying to get someone to turn the lights on before his wings iced up with freezing rain and snow. He crashed some distance from the airport in the open sage due to the weight of ice on his airplane's wings, walking away from his airplane after the crash but dying in the sage from a head injury he endured.

Richard Rosen's crash had nothing to do with crosswinds or the length of the runway.

I just researched crashes at Taos Regional Airport and found only one other crash, a small plane that crashed at Taos Regional Airport, Wednesday morning, July 10, 2013, killing one person on board. From the aerial video footage, it appears the plane completely missed the runway and the accident appears to have been pilot error, not crosswinds or the length of the runway.

On two occasions, companies have tried unsuccessfully to establish commercial flights in small planes from Taos Regional Airport. There was not enough demand as the cost was excessively high in relationship to the cost of driving to the Albuquerque airport and it was also less

expensive for people to rent a car at the airport so that they could visit Santa Fe on the way to Taos. So what has changed?

What is the issue this time? Why does this issue keep reappearing? I am wondering why current governmental leaders at Taos Pueblo have approved the runway and what they are thinking? It was through my encouragement, after hearing a radio interview, that Gilbert Suazo, then Governor of Taos Pueblo, showed up at the final public meeting held in 2007 in which the public was given almost no notice. Then Governor Suazo showed up with four other representatives from Taos Pueblo and strongly opposed the airport expansion in an eloquent and moving speech. His speech was aired for weeks over local radio stations in northern New Mexico and influenced the decision to halt plans for the airport expansion.

So why is it coming up again? And what money is being passed around behind the scenes?

Please contact Mayor Dan Barrone. I am sure he will make himself accessible and listen to the voice of our community. He can be reached at (575) 751-2003 during the week. Our community should not have to pay for something it does not need and invite change where the very wealthy arrive at the airport, bringing a gradual community transformation into a down-scale variation of Aspen or Vail.

Thomas French is an artist, sculptor and poet. He has worked in the community on programs for youth and family, community infrastructure, and environmental preservation. He has lived in Taos for over 30 years.