



# THE TAOS NEWS

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## My Turn

### Councilor Hahn's airport expansion analysis

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**Health:** Currently, the airport transfers distressed patients all over the region; there is a 94 percent availability. The project will minimally increase this percentage.

**Safety:** During construction, the shortened existing runway will have to be carefully managed as an increased danger will be posed. After construction there will be greater landing and take off flexibility. Few, if any, accidents were reported due to the condition of the current runway; expansion will improve the rate negligibly.

**Welfare:** It is estimated that 30 temporary employees may be hired as a result of the two-year construction project; none long term.

**Fire:** Is a threat in our County. Analysis indicates that expansion might augment a minor, local response, but it is unlikely that slurry in large amounts will be stored here; even so, it would take 24 hours to mix and transport locally. Large tankers stationed in Colorado, Wyoming and California currently are flown in with a 24-hour response time. Time savings seem negligible.

**CBA:** Though the FAA waived this requirement, the state DOT and the town and county's own economic development report indicates that the airport will have minimal impact.

It is tempting to invest \$300,000 – \$1.4 million for grants of \$22 million. However, currently airport revenues are est. at \$40,000 per year with expenses of \$140,000. I project that with expansion our revenues will double to \$80,000 per year with increased expenses of \$200,000 per year increasing our airport deficit.

Some mention that regionalizing the airport with commitments from local communities might diminish the operating deficit. None, with the exception of Taos County, have offered their help; to be fair, we at the town haven't asked.

Others suggest that we bring the FBO business 'in-house' to defray costs. Sources state that expertise and accountability could be an issue.

**Master Plan:** Though the FAA waived this requirement for property use "outside the fence" the Neighborhood Associations in collaboration with the County and Town might afford appropriate safeguards, though to date the process is barely getting started.

**Grant:** Some have stated that denying this grant application will preclude our ability to apply for other grants. I have found this not to be the case: the 1991 airport grant that was pulled and is now being pursued; other statements from government officials.

**EIS:** The formal EIS states that there will be no significant environmental impact; some have stated it must be supplemented as it is outdated. Perhaps a prudent action, but the original seemed fairly exhaustive with 400 public comments and 800 pages of testimony and response. Neighborhood Associations and collaboration with the town and county may mitigate concerns.

**Military Flights :** Current statutes can be augmented by citizens contacting Sen. Udall's office and local officials. The Air Force expects "no appreciable increase in flights." They further state that flight transgressions are investigated.

**Flight Frequency:** Sources state that flights will increase, but minimally.

**Dumping:** Sources state that although it may have occurred in the past, dumping is not allowed except in the case of an imminent crash.

**Disparity:** My research indicates that the "Aspenization" of Taos is not anticipated due to the impact of the expansion; the fact is that a huge disparity already exists. This problem must be addressed by the town and county and is not, in my opinion an airport expansion issue.

**Conclusion:** If this venture investment of our community resources moves forward, I hope and will do everything in my power to assure that it succeeds with appropriate accountability – but bear in mind that only 1 in 5 venture investments succeeds.

The argument comes down to my insight as a small businessman and social worker: we must build on and invest in our strengths. Is our community's strength an airport or acequias? Farming or "glitz"? Sustainability or risk? Small, local home grown businesses or chain stores? Taos is unique. That's why people come here.

Therefore, I oppose the Airport Expansion Project and would rather invest our tax dollars in what we're good at: acequias, farming, small business and sustainability; our infrastructure. If we invest our tax dollars in our aging infrastructure and acequias, utilizing grant opportunities, it could afford us the opportunity to repair and revitalize our town, employing just as many for perhaps a longer time, improving our own quality of life, our children's and attract visitors.

The airport is a public good. Infrastructure and acequias are a public good. Which serves more?

I submit that "the good of the many outweighs the good of the few."

*George "Fritz" Hahn is a Taos town councilor.*