

My Turn

Five airport expansion myths

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Myth No. 1: Once the planned Taos Airport expansion is built, citizens will be able to catch commuter flights to Denver or Albuquerque.

Fact: There are no regularly scheduled commuter flights in the offing.

Fact: The three former attempts to establish such a service failed due to lack of patrons.

Fact: "The potential for latent demand for expanded year-round commercial service by commuter aircraft was considered to be minimal." (EIS, Chapter 1.6.2.3.)

Myth No. 2: The current plans are for a modest cross-winds runway needed primarily for enhanced safety of local pilots.

Fact: The actual plans call for a mile and a half long runway strong enough to enable the traffic of large planes such as turbo-jets (but not commercial airliners).

Fact: The increased length and strength of the proposed runway will make it available to larger planes and, undoubtedly increased traffic.

Fact: Current airport plans do not call for a controller and taking into consideration increased flight paths and cross traffic it is arguable that it will enhance the safety of local smaller planes.

Fact: The new runway is projected to increase the proportion of days when smaller planes can take off and land safely due to wind direction from 94.13 percent to 95 percent. The increase hardly seems worth \$24 million of our taxpayer money.

Fact: A shorter, much less expensive cross-winds runway, which would accomplish the same increase in "coverage" for local planes, has never been considered or proposed.

Myth No. 3: The expansion will create many jobs and boost the economy.

Fact: Historically and statistically down-mountain ski towns have NOT benefited economically from expanded airports.

Fact: The Final Environmental Impact Statement concludes: “Permanent employment increases are not anticipated ...

Fact: No appreciable permanent change in employment over the temporary increase in employment for construction ...

Fact: “The incremental increase in tourism and population resulting from the improvement of SKX is expected to have a minor effect upon growth and development.”

Myth No. 4: Cannon AFB’s planned military training area has no relation to this expansion.

Fact: According to its initial Environmental Assessment, Cannon Air Force Base covets Northern New Mexico as a Low Altitude Training Area, The more thorough Environmental Impact Statement they were required to complete for this campaign is due to be published soon.

Fact: The low-altitude sorties they plan for this area include such operations as “terrain following / terrain avoidance” and “mid-air refueling with C-130s.”

Fact: According to Cannon’s website, to this they will be adding additional training exercises employing up to nine different kinds of aircraft,

Fact: When runways are upgraded, the Air Force takes advantage. In the Record of Decision 2012 for the Taos Airport expansion, Teri Bruner, Regional Administrator for the DOT/FAA states: “I certify, as prescribed by 49 U.S.C. 44502 ... that the proposed project is reasonably necessary for use in air commerce or in the interests of national defense.”

Myth No. 5: Only radical anti-progress conspiracy theorists oppose the expansion.

Fact: During the last two decades, the vast majority (800+) of those who commented during the required EPA Environmental Study spoke or wrote in opposition to the project.

Fact: The few proponents consisted primarily of pilots and real estate brokers, those who would benefit from this expansion. (See EIS at Taos Public Library)

Fact: In the only public forum on this expansion offered in nearly a decade, Aug. 25, 2014, the vast majority of participants packing the Town Council Chamber opposed the expansion. (See: taosnews.com/youtube_64f348b2-2e39-11e4-bb64-0019bb2963f4.html)

Fact: A recent *Taos News* online survey polled at 80.3 percent opposed to the expansion. Only 15.9 percent voted in favor.

Fact: This year over 1,000 persons signed a petition opposing the expansion. The majority of the public has consistently been opposed to this plan.

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