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Shorter runway during work could hinder flights at Taos airport

By J.R. Logan

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The construction of a second runway is meant to improve the long-term viability of the Taos Regional Airport, but the project could have a major short-term impact the number of jets landing at the facility.

To accommodate crews and heavy machinery for construction, the existing runway was shortened about 1,000 feet. That shorter length means some aircraft won't be able to take off and land.

"I expect to lose about 50 to 60 percent of our jet traffic," said Kino Chavez with Taos Aviation Services. "It's going to hurt us real bad."

In order to meet federal guidelines, the current runway needs to be shortened so it does not cross the new runway. When the expansion project is finished, the existing runway will be 420 feet shorter.

However, Chavez said he did not find out the runway would be shortened 1,000 feet while work is being done until after it was already started a couple weeks ago. Instead, he said he was under the impression the runway would be shortened only 420 feet, and that periodic closures would be necessary as crews worked in arrival and departure lanes.

"I understand that it allows them to do work, but we didn't get any notice," Chavez said.

Town officials say the plan was always to shorten the runway 1,000 feet during construction.

Chavez said he's already seen a 50 percent drop in jet traffic, and he expects things to get even less busy in the summer when warmer weather makes it even harder for aircraft to land and take off.

The first phase of construction includes the shortening of the existing runway, construction of a "haul road" to move equipment to and from the job site, and moving about one million cubic yards of dirt to bring the second runway to grade.

The runway is expected to remain short for about a year.

Data from the state show about \$1.1 million in gross receipts were generated at the airport alone in 2012. That does not include fuel sales, which Chavez expected to take a big hit with the reduced air traffic.

The project engineers, Armstrong Consultants, did not return calls and emails before press time.



Katharine Egli

Two wheel tractor-scraper trucks drive through Taos Regional Airport's new runway construction site March 10. The existing runway was shortened about 1,000 feet to accommodate crews, and the shorter runway means it will be tougher for planes to get in and out of Taos until work is complete.