



# THE TAOS NEWS

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## Taos moves \$650,000 to extend air service

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*The Taos News*; 14 Mar 2019



**The inaugural Taos Air flight at Taos Regional Airport gets ready to fly in December to Texas. The town of Taos plans to seek grant funds to promote the charter flights through the summer. Taos News**

As the winter winds down, partners of the charter flight service Taos Air are scrambling to find funding to keep the planes flying between Taos and Texas well into summer.

During Tuesday's (March 12) regular council meeting, the Taos Town Council voted unanimously to approve budget adjustments to accommodate for Taos Air summer service funding. According to town officials, the service has been at 70 percent capacity and has continuously brought visitors three times a week to the Taos area for the winter season. Each flight can carry 30 people. Extending the service will take the help of local governments as well as private funding. The town has taken the initiative to see the service through.

"This doesn't create any new funds," said Town Manager Rick Bellis. "It takes funds from existing accounts."

Overall, Taos Air will need \$650,000 for the summer air service, according to town officials. Angel Fire, Red River, Taos and Colfax County have agreed to commit some funds to the air service since they see it as a benefit. The town of Taos is currently in the process of requesting a \$200,000 marketing grant from the New Mexico Department of Transportation for aviation. The grant has not yet been received. If the town is not awarded the grant, the town will have to look for the money elsewhere.

To date, this is the first amount of money the town has set aside toward Taos Air, besides hangar work and adding a new runway to accommodate larger planes. The town was awarded a marketing grant from the Federal Transit Administration in 2018 for the service and was only allowed to use those funds toward marketing of the air service.

“When we were first discussing the airport I voted against the expansion,” said Councilor George “Fritz” Hahn. “Those of us opposed to the airport lost that debate. Now that that debate is over, it’s time to put our gloves on and make it work.”

In order to shore up the funds needed for the summer flights, the town is planning to shift \$650,000 of revenue from the transportation fund. Currently the town is moving \$450,000 without the marketing grant.

“We have sufficient cash to front this,” Bellis said.

Most of the funds, according to Bellis, are coming from the transportation fund, which is used to pay for such amenities like the Blue Bus.

“This is a one-time thing,” Mayor Dan Barrone said about the payment. “We hope it works.”

The one-time payment from the town will extend tourism air services through the summer as visitors continue to visit Taos and surrounding areas. According to town officials, half of the people using Taos Air stay in town and the rest head to areas like Red River, Taos Ski Valley and others.

The hope for the town is that enough visitors will utilize the air service and spend more money in the Taos area, adding to the gross receipts tax as well as lodger’s tax.

According to Councilor Darien Fernandez, the air service has many other uses than simply tourism as the plane could be viewed by industries such as film to offering an easier access to Taos.

In addition to approving the budget transfers, the town also will be looking at becoming the chief financial agent of the Intergovernmental Council of the Enchanted Circle for Taos Air. The town will handle all funds and collections relating to Taos Air if the governmental council approves.

Taos Air launched at the end of 2018 as an alternative travel opportunity for those flying into Taos from Texas. The air service makes three round trips per week to Texas airports and brings visitors to the Taos Regional Airport.