



AirTAP Fall Forum

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Proceedings



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Welcome



Jim Grothaus



Ray Rought

More than 100 people from general aviation airports and local government across Minnesota attended the third annual Airport Technical Assistance Program (AirTAP) Fall Forum, held October 11 and 12 at Breezy Point Conference Center near Brainerd, Minnesota.

Jim Grothaus, AirTAP director, welcomed participants, whose experience working with airports ranged from a few to 62 years. "We have a lot of experience in this room, and that's what this [event] is about—to learn from each other," he said.

Next, Bill Towle, manager of St. Cloud Regional Airport and president of the Minnesota Council of Airports (MCOA), invited feedback from participants and encouraged them to connect with AirTAP steering committee members with any questions.

Ray Rought, director of the Minnesota Department of Transportation's (Mn/DOT) Office of Aeronautics, commented that he was glad to see increased turnout each year as AirTAP grows. He said Mn/DOT supports the annual fall forum because airport personnel need some encouragement. "This is your school of hard knocks," he said. "So hopefully mistakes aren't repeated; you can learn from others." As a testament to the program's success, he added, other states are looking at AirTAP and wondering if they can duplicate it for their own state.

Want more?

In addition to the session summaries included here, AirTAP 2006 Fall Forum speaker presentations are available for viewing or download on the AirTAP Web site at www.airtap.umn.edu/events/fallforum/2006/.

Minnesota Airport Funding Status



Peter Buchen

In the forum's opening session, Bob Huber, manager of the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA's) Minneapolis Airports District Office, discussed the funding outlook from the federal perspective. The president, Senate, and House have proposed different numbers for 2007. "At this point, we don't know where it is at," he said.

For fiscal year 2006, the FAA issued over 2,000 grants for \$3.4 billion nationwide. In Minnesota, the amount was \$60 million for 71 grants. Of these dollars, 55 percent went to primary airports, 3 percent went to commercial service, 10 percent to relievers, and 32 percent to general aviation. "GA got 32 percent of the money, but were responsible for 77 percent of the total number of grants," Huber noted.

Huber also offered examples of what Airport Improvement Program funds could be used for. "Where would I tell you to spend your money? Safety: removing obstructions," Huber said. The second priority would be planning—"something to help the airport move along and decide how to spend its money," he added.

Following Huber, Peter Buchen, Airport Development Section Manager with Mn/DOT's Office of Aeronautics, talked about the state airport funding status. Projected shortfalls to the State Airports Fund have required

cuts to Mn/DOT's Airport Development and Assistance program in fiscal years 2006 and 2007, Buchen said. As a result, Mn/DOT will need to prioritize projects to receive funding. Projects related to safety will rank high, followed by pavement preservation, projects that can leverage federal funds, and finally, emergencies.

Telling an airport that its project won't be funded "has been hard for us," Buchen said. "We've never had to do this before."

Buchen said that fiscal year 2008 is "the light at the end of the tunnel everyone is looking at," although Mn/DOT does not yet know how much money will be available. Despite an anticipated funding boost for 2008, Mn/DOT's future revenue stream is declining while the needs of Minnesota's airports are increasing, Buchen said.

Buchen mentioned strategies Mn/DOT is considering, noting that it hasn't settled on anything and welcomes input from others. Those strategies include working from a prioritized list of projects, choosing those projects that leverage federal funds, or using entitlement funds first.

Finally, Buchen said Mn/DOT will consider that some lower-priority projects might still add tremendous economic value to an airport.

“Where would I tell you to spend your money? Safety: removing obstructions.”

—Bob Huber

To advocate for your airport, it helps to know the role of state legislative committees, how the legislature is structured, strategies for communicating with local boards and commissions, and how to package requests effectively.

Amy Vennewitz, deputy director of finance and planning for the Metropolitan Council, began with an overview of the current legislative structure. In describing the various committees, Vennewitz noted that typical committees with jurisdiction over airport issues are the transportation policy committees (both the Senate and House have subcommittees on aviation); transportation finance (which oversees the Mn/DOT budget); state and local government operations (which deals with land use, noise, and MAC governance issues); and the Legislative Commission on Metropolitan Governance (which oversees the governance and budget of the Met Council).

“Transportation has been somewhat of a different animal in the legislature in that highways have a dedicated source of funding,” Vennewitz said, and it tends to operate “a bit outside the rest of the committees.”

Following Vennewitz, Margaret Donahoe, legislative director for the Transportation Alliance, offered advice for getting attention and funding for a particular cause.

“Your main goal as an advocate is to get noticed,” she said, telling the audience that they

need to contact officials at all levels—local, state, and federal. “It really is true: the more noise you make, the more attention you will get...There is competition for limited money.”

One strategy is to quantify needs, Donahoe said. “If you need a new runway, how much is it going to cost?”

In addition, make sure you can explain why airports are important and why people should care. “Look at it from the perspective of the general public,” she said. “To the extent you can get away from the bricks and mortar and make it about people, it really does increase its interest for the average person.”

Finally, get to know your legislators before you need them, Donahoe advised. Know who represents you at all levels, and then work on building a relationship with them. The time immediately following elections is a good time to contact lawmakers, since they are not as busy. “Call them up after the election and congratulate them,” Donahoe suggested.

The media are a critical piece of any advocacy effort, Donahoe added. This might be in the form of letters to the editor, editorials, or news stories in small-town papers—all ways to get free advertising. “The bottom line is, although we focus on legislators, whether or not the public cares about this issue will affect whether legislators care. If they’re not hearing from their constituents about airports, then it’s way down on their priority list.”



Margaret Donahoe

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—Margaret Donahoe

Airport Maintenance

As in past fall forums, this year’s event featured several concurrent sessions on airport maintenance topics.

In a session on snow and ice control operations, three airport managers—Steve Sievek of Brainerd Lakes Regional Airport, Kurt Claussen of Rochester International Airport, and John Olson of Hutchinson Airport—brought nearly 40 years of collective experience to the discussion of techniques such as applying chemical deicers and constructing windrows.

The other major discussion concerned rating the runway for braking and how that information should be used. Claussen emphasized creating a paper trail for liability reasons

when issuing runway braking condition values. Olson, however, noted that his airport offered no braking rating but instead relied on pilots to communicate the information to each other. Debate followed as to which rating system to use and whose responsibility it is to issue this information. The common concern for each manager was liability, and their main focus was on preventing any accidents related to runway condition, they said.

During an “open mic” session, maintenance and administrative airport staff from around the state gathered to share ideas and solutions to common maintenance problems.

The first major topic was that of fixed-based operators (FBOs) or fuel farms. Views varied

“Keeping your pavement in good shape is what’s going to get it to 30 or 40 years.”

—Ann Johnson

on this subject, with some participants stating that having an FBO was a positive growth factor while others expressed their personal experiences with FBOs as unprofitable.

Another common problem faced by all the airports was that of wildlife control, especially control of deer and geese. The problems solved by fencing were often paired with the reality that fencing keeps animals in as well as out. One-way gates were mentioned as being helpful; however, they are prone to breaking. Another solution mentioned was to acquire a permit from the DNR to shoot both deer and geese. Endangered species permits may be

secured for some species as well. Participants also noted that some varieties of grasses are less attractive to deer and geese than others.

Equipment was discussed briefly, with participants showing an interest in promoting the Mn/DOT Web site (www.dot.state.mn.us/equipment/index.html) for purchasing or selling used equipment.

Finally, Ann Johnson, president of Professional Engineering Services, and Tracy Schmidt with Mn/DOT led a session on pavement maintenance and distress.

Asphalt and concrete pavements on a runway should last at least 20 years, Johnson said, “but keeping your pavement in good shape is what’s going to get it to 30 or 40 years.”

Typical distresses on airport pavements include various types of cracking and surface defects such as rutting and raveling. Left untreated, cracks can degrade the underlying aggregate base that supports the pavement.

“Crack sealing is probably your number one maintenance tool,” Johnson said, reminding participants to plan for it in their CIP requests.

Schmidt, a principal engineer in Mn/DOT’s Airport Development Section, conducts pavement condition index, or PCI, surveys at Minnesota’s public airports every three years. The process results in consistent ratings and record keeping, tracks the condition of the statewide airport system, and helps airports with developing their CIPs.

Schmidt advocated non-destructive testing



Forum participants from across the state, including Steve Sievek (with mic), asked questions of speakers and colleagues in sessions on airport maintenance and administration topics.

Lunch with State Legislators

Over lunch the first day, Senator Ann Rest, who chairs the Senate’s Subcommittee on Airways, Railways, and Waterways, and Representative Michael Beard, who serves on the House Aviation Subcommittee, shared some thoughts about aviation’s role in the last legislative session. Among the bills that passed was Senate File 1940.

“First and foremost, the operation and maintenance of airports were declared essential public services,” Beard said. “It also declared that when cities adopt a comprehensive plan, if it’s incompatible with the state

aviation fund, then it’s not eligible for state airports fund assistance.”

Another topic of interest was the transfer of \$15 million back to the state airports fund from the general fund, scheduled to happen in July 2007.

Rest guessed that the entire amount would not be available in July, but that some funds could possibly be released early if the budget bills are passed in May.

Both lawmakers commented that generally, the aviation issue that generates the most attention in the legislature is noise. When

as a way to determine the strength of pavement—and ultimately, what sort of treatment it needs. “It’s well worth your money to do this, because if you think that all you need is an overlay and once you start you discover... structural issues, then...we may not be able to give you the money for it,” she said.

As a condition of receiving federal money to replace or reconstruct pavement, an airport needs to meet certain FAA requirements that ensure the airport is conducting regular pavement inventories, adhering to an inspection schedule, keeping records, and following a maintenance plan, Schmidt concluded.

Airport Land Use and Storm Water Management

Two forum sessions covered issues related to areas surrounding an airport. In a concurrent session covering the new *Airport Land Use Compatibility Manual*, Kathy Vesely, planning and research specialist with Mn/DOT’s Office of Aeronautics, and Gina Mitchell, Bolton and Menk, discussed how zoning issues would affect local and regional airports.

The topic surrounded SF 1940. This new legislation, which became effective on August 1, 2006, requires real estate disclosure when property is located within an airport safety zone. Vesely presented an example to illustrate how this might impact a typical community airport and the property surrounding it. She also pointed out rule changes, defined the zones surrounding an airport, and discussed the role of a Joint Zoning Board.

Participants worked in groups to determine which localities would be invited to a zoning meeting as well as procedures for a specific airport, based on maps and airspace definitions that were distributed. Other group ex-

ercises involved making zoning decisions about specific land uses surrounding airports and considering the rights of landowners and communities to illustrate that environmental justice can play an important role in many of these decisions.

Vesely encouraged participants to remember that while procedures need to be followed, ultimately zoning boards try to act in the best interest of all concerned.

In another session, speakers discussed storm water runoff management from different perspectives. First Julie Rantala, a pollution control specialist with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, gave an overview of permit requirements for storm water management at airports. She covered the distinctions related to both general and individual permits, as well as the chain of responsibility and the importance of inspections when maintaining permits.

Roy Fuhrmann of the Metropolitan Airports Commission reviewed the Oil Pollution

it comes to aviation, Rest said, “I think most of my colleagues think of themselves as passengers...They don’t go out of their way to become informed unless they’re on a committee, or have an airport in their jurisdiction, or there is a particular complaint, like noise.”

Agreeing with Rest’s comments about noise, Beard added that he would like to shift the focus to economic issues. “Aviation issues across the state are not seen as a partisan issue, but rather as something that’s good for...the economic well-being of the state,” he said.



Rep. Mike Beard and Sen. Ann Rest

“Aviation issues across the state are not seen as a partisan issue, but rather as something that’s good for...the economic well-being of the state.”

—Rep. Mike Beard

“If you don’t know your counterpart at your neighboring airport, I challenge you to find out...See how you can help each other meet your goals.”

—Shaun Germolus

Prevention Regulation as it pertains to the operation of airports. This regulation requires facilities to develop and implement a site-specific Spill Prevention, Control, and Countermeasures plan (SPCC) to address:

- Operating procedures to prevent an oil discharge
- Control measures to prevent an oil discharge from entering navigable waters
- Countermeasures to contain, clean up, and mitigate the effects of any oil discharge that affects navigable waters

Fuhrmann also stressed the importance of spill control because of the immediate impact fuel and oil could have on surrounding waters in the state. He shared a number of slides related to methods of spill control and reclamation—applicable in most cases to both large and smaller airports.

Finally, Todd Hubmer of WSB and Associates discussed permit applications and enforcement actions. He also noted changes made to the SWPPP tool kit and emphasized the need to keep permits active.

Airport Initiation

In this session, three airport managers shared challenges they faced on the job and how they overcame them.

When Melissa Galvan accepted the job of airport manager at Willmar Municipal Airport, she took on a unique challenge as well: Willmar was in the process of moving its airport to a new site.

Galvan’s learning curve was fast. She realized she didn’t fully comprehend what it took to get an airport not just running, but running well. She was aided, however, by her connection to others in the industry.

Galvan says she was also fortunate to earn the trust of pilots, the city council, and the public. “I’m the first to admit when I don’t know something, and I think that attests to my credibility.” What resulted after her first year on the job was the successful opening of the new airport.

Her advice to others new to airports: network, not only through the Minnesota Council of Airports and AirTAP, but also with the local community.

Al Pelzer is the airport manager at Fairmont Regional Airport and an experienced pilot. At Fairmont, since the manager handles the grass, snow, and lights, “if a plane arrives [I] can fuel it, then go back to mowing,” Pelzer said. The arrangement generally works well for an airport the size of Fairmont, he added.

Pelzer finds that being a pilot is also advantageous. “Whenever I’m on the road, I’m always snooping around to see how others do things so I can take that back to Fairmont,” he said.

The increased cost of utilities and insurance is a challenge at Fairmont, but successes include more student starts and a substantial increase in based aircraft—27 today, up from 12 nine years ago.

Shaun Germolus left his position last year as director of operations for the Duluth Airport Authority to run his own consulting business, AirportAdmin.

Like Galvan, he landed a job working with airports right out of college and discovered “things that weren’t in the textbooks,” he said. One thing he noticed was outdated manuals when it came to security and emergency preparedness. He advised audience members to come up with a page of instructions for staff so they know what to do during the first 30 minutes or so of an emergency. Also, conduct exercises for emergency responders so they get familiar with the airport and know where to go, he said.

Germolus also urged airport personnel who conduct inspections to develop, use, and save checklists. Besides improving operations, documentation can prove helpful in cases of liability: it can show what you’ve been doing to take care of the airport and that you’re being proactive in keeping facilities safe and efficient, he added.

Echoing Galvan’s remarks, Germolus said that other airport personnel are a valuable asset for those just starting out. “If you don’t know your counterpart at your neighboring airport, I challenge you to find out...See how you can help each other meet your goals,” he said.



Shaun Germolus



Al Pelzer



Melissa Galvan

Promoting the Benefit of Your Airport

The concurrent session focusing on airport promotion allowed participants to share their ideas in a “conversation circle” format. Several participants expressed frustration by the lack of money for promotion, even as they saw a critical need for it. Others described communities that are indifferent or unaware of what takes place at their airport as well as the benefit of having one.

The benefits named by participants included delivery of merchandise ordered online as well as overnight delivery of urgent packages. Tourists often fly into small airports and then spend money in the community. And companies consider access to an airport when making decisions about doing business in a particular area. Concern was voiced, however, that individuals do not connect these benefits to their local airport. In addition, benefits need to be considered along with the costs of operating an airport and who is paying—the city,

the region, the users, and others.

Some ideas for promotion included inviting local Rotary and Kiwanis clubs out to the airport as well as other community members, using the economic impact calculator (available at www.dot.state.mm.us/aero), and loaning an identifiable airport car to business people who fly into a community.



Cheri Marti facilitated a conversation circle on airport promotion.

“Airports attract business. It’s our job to sell that message.”

—Bryan Ryks

Conversation with Jeff Hamiel

Jeff Hamiel, executive director of the Metropolitan Airports Commission, returned again to the annual event to talk with attendees about current topics in aviation, including funding of reliever airports, speculation about the fate of Mesaba Airlines, and predictions of how increasing numbers of very light jets (VLJs) will affect regional airports.

Using Anoka County Airport as an example, Hamiel said the MAC is moving away from subsidizing smaller reliever airports, which must now explore other ways—such as through development of non-aeronautical resources—to fund their operations.

Most reliever airports cannot afford the expense of capital investments and so rely on Minneapolis/St. Paul International to support major projects like building a new runway, Hamiel said. “Now that whole model has changed. I have no idea how it’s going to turn out, but I can tell you so far, what’s happening with Anoka has been a bumpy road.”

Hamiel said the MAC board and NWA believe there’s a benefit in putting money back into reliever airports. “Part of our negotiations with NWA due to the bankruptcy is what level of contribution the airline should have and what

role MSP should play in funding some activity at relievers,” he said.

Next, Hamiel raised the issue of very light jets (VLJs) and how they might affect operations at some of Minnesota’s small airports. Deliveries of VLJs in the Twin Cities “mean that these jets could be flying into your town being flown by someone possibly with the same flight credentials as you and I have,” he said.

One participant predicted that incidents during the initial phase of VLJ operations could affect the jets’ ultimate success. Another felt that the requirements of the jets would limit problems. Others felt that the majority of airports in the state would not be affected—and where they are affected, it could be positive in that some manufacturers in Minnesota are making parts for VLJs.

“I think this is going to be important for every person in this room who is tied to an airport,” Hamiel said. Because the jets fly at higher altitudes and faster speeds, there is less room for error, he continued. “When you touch down, it’s a different animal. It’s more important for an airport operator because in Minnesota in winter, you’d better have that runway clean.”



Jeff Hamiel

“These [very light] jets could be flying into your town being flown by someone possibly with the same flight credentials as you and I have... This is going to be important for every person in this room...”

—Jeff Hamiel

Effective Project Closeout Completion



Nancy Nistler

In the forum's final session, presenters Nancy Nistler of the FAA Minneapolis Airports District Office, Tracy Schmidt of Mn/DOT's Office of Aeronautics, and Lyle Kratzke with TKDA explained project closeout preparation.

Nistler began by giving a thorough review of the Airport Improvement Program (AIP) and withholding levels and grant amendments. She reviewed the guide for requesting a federal grant and encouraged people to note the changes and make comments. It's important to follow each step in the process to ensure it goes smoothly, she said. She went on to outline the federal grant request procedure and explained the FAA programming forms required for all AIP funding requests. She told attendees that there must be enough information in the justification section of the Project Information Sheet for the project to proceed on schedule.

According to a July 2005 rule change, final grant funds will be released only after submission of the closeout reports. This change was implemented to encourage airport sponsors to complete the closeout process, Nistler said. Participants raised concerns over this process not only being retroactive, but also hurting

smaller communities that could not afford to have these funds withheld. Nistler responded that the FAA will consider hardship situations.

The participants then completed a hands-on exercise with the fund request forms to help them better understand the process.

Schmidt began by outlining the criteria for determining when a federal project is complete. These include physical and financial completion of the work and all administrative requirements met. The points Schmidt emphasized were:

- Projects must be closed out within three years of the date the grant was issued and accepted.
- Closeouts must be submitted within 90 days of the completion of the work.
- The final \$10,000 (for projects less than \$500,000) and \$50,000 (for projects \$500,000 or greater) will be withheld until the closeout is submitted.

In addition, submitting a closeout promptly allows unused entitlements to be released for other projects, expedites amendments, and avoids the need to cover unreimbursed costs for a long period of time, Schmidt said.

Responsibility for the preparation of the closeout usually falls on the project sponsor, who includes this task as a separate element in the consultant agreement. Once the closeout is submitted, Mn/DOT Aeronautics will review the draft and submit the final copy to the FAA.

Lyle Kratzke then presented a case study of the closeout process and offered these tips:

- Collect and record all construction information during the construction phase.
- Maintain complete records.
- Submit the paperwork to Mn/DOT.
- For sponsors: keep track of administrative costs, and include those costs in pay requests. Also include DBE information.



Participants in the Project Closeout session worked through an exercise on FAA fund request forms.

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