

AIR TAP Briefings

A publication of the Airport Technical Assistance Program of the Center for Transportation Studies at the University of Minnesota

Spring 2008

Special Fall Forum Issue: This issue of AirTAP *Briefings* features extended coverage of the 2007 AirTAP Fall Forum, held October 16 and 17 in Breezy Point, Minn.

Annual Fall Forum highlights airport image, safety

More than 70 people from general aviation airports and community government across Minnesota attended the fourth annual Airport Technical Assistance Program (AirTAP) Fall Forum, held in October 2007 at Breezy Point Conference Center near Brainerd, Minn. The forum's opening sessions on airport image-making were especially relevant in a year in which several local airports were in the media spotlight.



Gary Workman

Jim Grothaus, AirTAP director, opened the event and thanked those who had helped plan and put on the forum, including airport consultants WSB & Associates and Ann Johnson of Professional Engineering Services. In his opening remarks, Gary Workman, the new director of the Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT) Office of Aeronautics, acknowledged the many contributions made by his predecessor, Ray Rought. Bill Towle, manager of St. Cloud Regional Airport and chair of the Minnesota Council of Airports (MCOA), also welcomed attendees.

The forum was sponsored by Minnesota AirTAP and the Mn/DOT Office of Aeronautics, in cooperation with the Federal Aviation Administration and MCOA.

2007 Fall Forum Sessions

The following sessions were held over the two-day event:

- Lunch with Policymakers
- Fuel Quality: Handling and Storage
- Developing a Positive Image for Your Airport
- Wildlife and Turf Maintenance Issues
- Planning Challenges and Solutions
- Conversation with Jeff Hamiel
- Airport Lighting and NAVAID Maintenance
- Master Planning
- CIP Basics
- Operating a Safe Airport

Airports must create and project positive image

In the forum's opening session, "Image-Making for Your Airport," Tom Bullington, president of CityImage Communications, said airports should create an image for themselves before someone else does it for them. "Crisis communications should not be your first experience with communications," he said. If an airport has a solid, positive image, "when something negative happens, it becomes just one piece—not all—of your image."

Bullington defined image as "something one sees, remembers, or imagines, whether or not it has any basis in fact." What's important to note, he said, is that image is a person's perception of what they observe, not necessarily reality.

To begin creating or improving an airport's image, Bullington advised attendees to develop key messages, practice strategic media relations, and use the Web and other tools to communicate with their target audience.

Knowing what to say

A key message, Bullington explained, is a point you want to come across in a news story. "You're in an elevator," he said. "You have 30 seconds to tell someone all the important things about your airport. What do you say?" Some examples might be the number of hangars at the airport, how many flights the airport has each day, how much revenue is coming in, or how operations are running over the past year.

Key messages are typically short and memorable. They are what you convey in a media interview—a time in which you don't want a free flow of information.



Tom Bullington, with microphone, questions Harold Van Leeuwen, Bemidji Regional Airport, during a practice interview in the forum's image-making session.

Having these points will also help your airport present a consistent image to others.

Once you've developed your key messages, ensure all airport staff know them, Bullington said. And rehearse. If you are going to be speaking before anyone, Bullington said, go through what you want to say out loud first. "It really helps to hear yourself."

Becoming media saavy

Airports need to learn how to use media to their advantage to communicate a positive image. First, Bullington advised staff to get to know local reporters personally and build a rapport with them, especially those reporters who may be interested in aviation. Since staff turnover at small newspapers is high, building relationships is often a continual process. When a reporter knows you and knows how to contact you, she or he may call you first if something aviation-related happens in the community.

When a reporter does call, however, don't immediately jump in answering questions, Bullington cautioned, and don't speculate about something you're unfamiliar with. The best way to respond is to ask the reporter what the story is about and what questions she or he has, then arrange for a good time to call back with the answers. It's important that you do call back or you may seem evasive, he added. Another good idea is for an airport to choose one person to serve as its spokesperson.

Bullington urged airport staff to have a plan for crisis communications to prevent them from saying too much or answering questions that haven't been asked. "Never go off the record. There's no such thing," Bullington warned. "And never say, 'No comment.' It sounds like you're guilty." Even if you have no comment, he said, think of something to say, such as, "My attorney has advised me not to say anything."

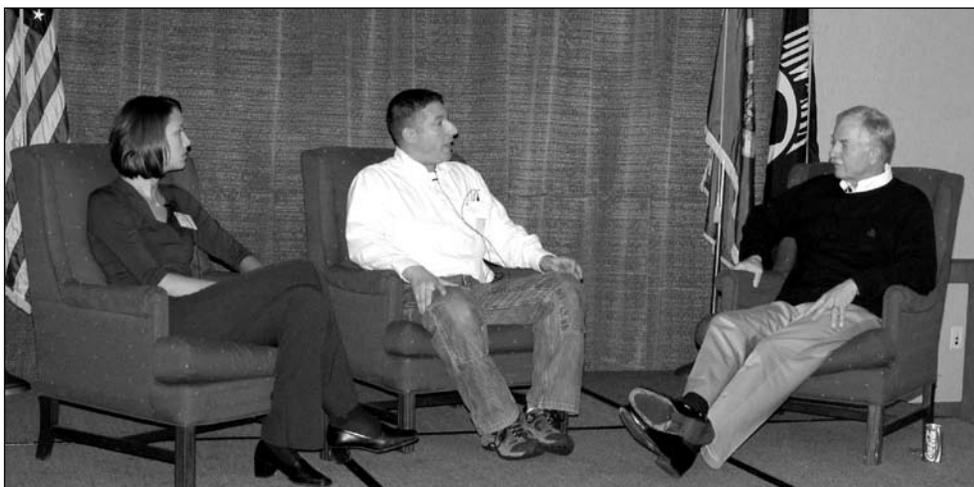
Image-making continued on page 3

New format debuts as ‘Late Afternoon with Jeff Hamiel’

Jeff Hamiel, executive director of the Metropolitan Airports Commission, returned to the annual forum to discuss current aviation issues in the metro area, including the MAC’s \$127 million settlement with southern metro property owners on noise-abatement work and Northwest Airline’s emergence from bankruptcy. Although passengers and operations are down, Hamiel said he expects the airline to stabilize, then start to grow the market again. He also talked about the possibility of a merger between NWA and Delta Air Lines.

Hamiel also commented on several reliever airport issues. Flying Cloud Airport is working toward getting support from the business community for a new runway and hangar construction. In anticipation of more very light jets (VLJs) and increased corporate activities in the metro area over the next 5 to 10 years, the airport will need more hangar space—and more sophisticated hangar space—for jets, Hamiel said.

The MAC has partnered with the Anoka County-Blaine Airport on a renovation plan in which the county sold bonds to finance airport improvements and development. The county will also manage the building area and select the fixed-base operator. “It’s been a struggle for them because...folks who don’t know aviation very well who think that there’s a gold mine out there learn pretty quickly... it’s not quite that easy,” Hamiel said. He added, however, that he thinks the project is on the right track now, with a new investor group that has an interesting plan to develop the new building areas.



Melissa Galvan, Mark Hoyne, and Jeff Hamiel chat about what’s happening at regional airports.

The fate of Crystal Airport has been a subject of speculation, since the city has wanted to open up the land it occupies to residential and commercial development. Contrary to the rumor that MAC supports closing down the airport, Hamiel said the MAC wants to keep the airport operating—with some changes that include a new runway configuration and some redevelopment. “This is an airport that’s going to stay an airport, and we’re going to size it properly for the kinds of future operations that we see on the airfield,” he said. Those operations include a focus on VLJs and on businesses owning single- and twin-engine prop airplanes.

Hamiel then invited two Minnesota airport managers, Melissa Galvan of Wilmar and Mark Hoyne of Grand Rapids, to participate in an afternoon talk show-style discussion.

Galvan said that one of her most challenging tasks has been moving tenants from

Wilmar’s old airport to its new one, which involved moving 11 hangars. There were “a lot of unanticipated costs,” she said.

Galvan said she would like to see the Wilmar airport market itself for cargo, since the new airport has the space and some facilities for it.

Hoyne, who had just returned to his position in Grand Rapids after a 22-month military deployment, talked about the loss of commercial service at his airport. Although many in the community want to bring it back, Hoyne said, “the wants of the community don’t outweigh the economics of supporting that service.”

Hoyne commented that the airport has several suitable areas for development but has no takers yet. Also, the terminal building has been vacant since Mesaba left, and the airport would like to fill it with an aviation-related activity, perhaps private commercial owners.

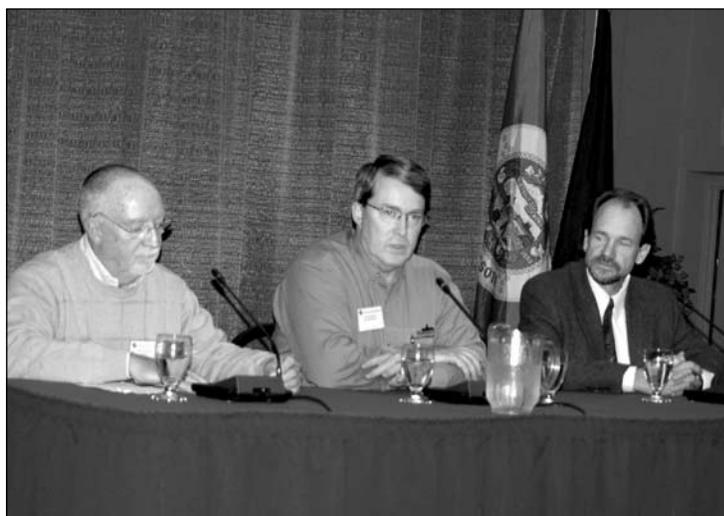
Policymakers share views on recent aviation issues

Gary Workman, director of Mn/DOT’s Office of Aeronautics, moderated a luncheon session in which Minnesota Representative Michael Beard (R-District 35A) and Senator Michael Jungbauer (R-District 48) addressed current legislative issues related to aviation.

Beard said he is participating in a committee recently formed to look at the state’s revenue streams for aeronautics. Airline taxes and registration fees in Minnesota are among the highest in the nation, he said. “I have heard that if we could lower [them], it might bring back some of the larger aircraft,” he said.

Beard also talked about work that resulted from an airplane crash in 2003 near Grand Marais, in which the two survivors’ insurance claim was initially denied. Legislation was passed in 2007 to increase the required minimum liability limits on aircraft insurance (from \$25,000 per passenger seat to \$100,000). Beard said that an aviation insurance study group was created to look at the issue and make some recommendations. “If pilots are driven off because they can’t afford insurance, there won’t be a lot of flying going on,” he said.

Senator Jungbauer, a member of the transportation budget and policy division finance committee, said that when he’s on the road in Minnesota, he notices the ubiquitous new development. “I see a lot of new construction going up around airports,” he said. “How are we planning the future of our airports?” He urged airports to work to promote themselves and the benefits they bring to a community. When communities are planning



Gary Workman, Rep. Michael Beard, and Sen. Michael Jungbauer

for future growth, airports can make the case that they helped the community grow, particularly in outstate Minnesota. “Use the airport as a key component of the strategic growth for a community,” he urged. “What does it bring to a city every time a plane lands? You guys have got to know that, and you have to protect that for all it’s worth.”

Reporters are always thinking about what the headline will be, even for fluff pieces, Bullington said. And what starts as a fluff story might take a different turn. The airport's spokesperson or whoever is being interviewed should be prepared for a "zinger"—a question that might catch her or him off guard. One possible response: "I don't know about that, but here's what I do know...." Go back to your key messages, "stuff you know is factual," Bullington said.



Tom Bullington

Bullington then led several volunteers from the audience through a mock media interview, giving participants a chance to see how they might react to questions during an actual interview and how they might prepare for it.

Using tools of the trade

Having one consistent logo for an airport will help convey a professional image, whereas multiple logos can dilute an identity, Bullington said. If possible, use the logo on all the airport's materials (pens, stationary, etc.). Consider producing publications, such as a printed newsletter, an electronic newsletter, or contributions to other publications (e.g., letters to the editor or a guest column in a local newspaper), he added.

Reaching a broad audience has become easier and more immediate thanks to technology. "Technology is something all airports should be tapping into," Bullington said. With e-mail lists, an airport can get information out to airport users right away. Blogs are free, informal ways to connect with airport supporters. But most critical, Bullington said, is for airports to have a Web site. "If you're not

on the Web, it's almost like you're not there." A Web site can expand the airport's reach by providing essential information about airport operations as well as timely updates.

Bullington acknowledged that most small airports don't have staff to devote to creating or maintaining a Web site. One suggestion was to work with the city and county to piggyback on their Web sites or leverage their resources. Free (open source) software is available for creating Web sites, and sites can be made so they are easy to update (such as with content management systems), Bullington said. A home page should be updated at least once every two weeks to keep it fresh.

When evaluating your Web site or any of your communications, "Step out of yourself and think like a potential user," Bullington said. "Does it have a feeling of 'We don't want you to contact us' or 'Yes, come fly with us—come use our facility'?"

Press releases are another tool for generating media coverage of your airport, Bullington said, and a goal should be to distribute two press releases each month. Busy reporters and editors often appreciate having something written for them and may run your news as is. Or, you can send a short list of highlights and ask the reporter to follow up with you for more details, Bullington said. When creating a press release, identify the target audience and consider why it should care about your news; this will help you frame your message. Put contact information at the top, write a headline that grabs attention, list the most important information first, and include the "who, what, when, why, and how" of the news. For distributing releases, Bullington said that reporters and editors prefer e-mail (but don't send any-

thing on Fridays or between Thanksgiving and New Year's, which are "dead zones," he said). Follow up in one to two days with a phone call. And if a reporter won't do a story, ask why not.

Once an airport has developed its key messages and a Web presence, Bullington said, it can consider planning some events (those that involve school-aged children are especially effective at creating "goodwill ambassadors" for the airport) and getting involved in the local community with non-aeronautical as well as aeronautical groups.

Remember that customer service—how the phone is answered at your airport, or the timeliness of your response—is an important part of image, Bullington said.

Putting it all together

Communications planning should be part of an airport's overall operations planning, Bullington said. A communications plan might be fairly simple, such as sending one press release a month or having coffee with a reporter once a month. Establish a purpose for the plan and what you want to accomplish, and identify the intended audience. To help create a communications plan, an airport may want to conduct surveys, convene focus groups, or audit its current practices. "Give some people cookies and coffee and ask questions," he said. Key themes may emerge from research that will help guide planning.

Finally, Bullington advised airports to plan ahead a year or two. Changes at the airport, such as construction or a major event, will require more marketing efforts—preferably well in advance.

"I know you have tons on your plate, but communications should also be on your plate," he said.

Safe aviation begins on the airport

A session on airport safety covered some of the responsibilities of airport operators from three different perspectives.

First, Jesse Carriger, assistant manager of the FAA's Minneapolis Airports District Office, discussed general aviation airport safety as it relates to Part 139 certificated airports (those with operating certificates issued by the FAA under Code of Federal Regulations 14, Part 139).

Airport self-inspections—and good record keeping—is vital for maintaining safe operations at an airport and subsequently minimizing risk for airport sponsors, Carriger said. Some problem-prone areas to check: signage (for missing or out-of-order panels), runway lights (to ensure they are clean and visible), and markings (to ensure they are not faded). "Winter plows can wreak havoc on markings," Carriger said.

While the FAA requires Part 139 airports to have an airport emergency plan, it encourages (but does not require) general aviation airports to have one as well. All airports should conduct simulated disaster drills, develop after-accident checklists, ensure local aid agreements are in place, outline access points to the airfield, and train responding personnel, Carriger said.

Also, if an airport is near a lake it will need to make provisions for water rescue.

Carriger referred attendees to the many resources on airport self-inspections available from the FAA, either online (www.faa.gov) or in print.

Following Carriger, Joe Morgan, operations manager for the Princeton Automated Flight Service Station, addressed concerns about the new system for issuing Notices to Airmen (NOTAMs). In late 2005, the FAA transitioned responsibility for this and other flight service station duties to Lockheed Martin.

Morgan offered advice for getting better results and being better prepared. When filing a NOTAM, callers who cannot get through with the local phone number should try the national one (1-877-487-6867) and say "Minnesota" during the voice prompt. Another option is to fax a request to Princeton (between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m. only), making sure to print clearly and legibly in block letters. Those faxing will need to wait for a confirmation call.

"You've got to help yourself in this and be very specific," Morgan said. Airport operators can refer to FAA Advisory Circular 150/5200-

28C, *Notices to Airmen (NOTAMs) for Airport Operators* (www.faa.gov), for more information, including a list of authorized contractions and abbreviations.

Morgan assured attendees that the agency is aware of the problems and is working on improvements. "You need to keep an eye on the changes, there's going to be lot of them, for months and years to come," he added.

Brainerd-area pilot Mike Kneeland said that as a flight instructor, one of his biggest concerns is teaching safety awareness. "Anyone can learn the rules. Pilots aren't dumb, but they sometimes make dumb mistakes. We want to fly rather than read about [flying]."

Anything airport operators can do to make an airport environment standardized is helpful, Kneeland said. For example, if the lighting isn't quite right, that can erode a pilot's confidence coming in—and confidence plays a major role in flying safely, Kneeland said. Also, operators shouldn't worry about giving too much information, especially concerning snow and ice conditions. "Anything you can tell us about our safety is important...the majority of accidents in aviation happen during the landing phase, and that's on your area."

Session gives up-close look at lighting and NAVAIDs

In a session held at Brainerd Regional Airport, lighting engineer John Schroeder, Mn/DOT Office of Aeronautics, led participants in a hands-on look at airport lighting and navigational aids (NAVAIDs) maintenance.

Using diagrams to help illustrate, Schroeder gave advice on installing various light configurations. One specific problem to avoid with base-mount installation is not allowing enough slack on the conduit running from the can lid; if slack is taken up by ground movement from frost, the lighting equipment can be pulled out of alignment. When installing lighting, Schroeder also advised electricians to apply anti-seize grease to all threaded components as called out in the plan—even those that are stainless.

Schroeder noted that Appendix 5 of FAA Advisory Circular 150/5340-30C, *Design and Installation Details for Airport Visual Aids*, provides the recommended layouts for equipment location, details for footings, details for installation of wiring, and standards for alignment; the document should be used for all new lighting projects. In addition, make sure the electrical contractor installing the airport lighting system is familiar with the FAA standards, Schroeder advised.

A participant in the session suggested following a punch list during construction to avoid installation mistakes. If someone working on a lighting project is new, he or she might not understand the importance of alignment, for example. Schroeder recommended checking the alignment of visual approach slope indicators (VASIs) and precision approach path indicators (PAPIs) quarterly and seeking feedback from pilots. Also, it's important to have some means to know that the tool used to check alignment is accurate (i.e., is calibrated). With PAPIs, remember that "if any one of the four boxes is out of alignment, it will turn the whole [system] off," Schroeder added.

Mn/DOT is trying to phase out and replace the old lighting equipment still in use, because it's difficult or impossible to get parts for and is hard to repair. If an air-



John Schroeder, left, demonstrates maintenance procedures for a PAPI.

port does need new equipment, Schroeder suggested putting it in its airport Capital Improvement Program and spreading the purchase out over several years.

Schroeder also recommended locking up equipment maintenance manuals and installation documents for lighting systems so they are available when needed.

Some maintenance should be performed only by qualified personnel because of the potential for serious injury or death. For example, when troubleshooting series circuits, open circuit voltages in the loop can be fatal, Schroeder said. Airport staff doing the work need a foolproof safety routine that includes shutting off regulators and circuit breakers, taking plug cut-out units with them in the truck, locking the electrical vault, and always assuming the circuit being worked on is energized, he said. Likewise, troubleshooting for runway end identifier lights (REILs) is for qualified personnel only. Ensure that power is off and that high-voltage bleed down has occurred when the cabinet door is opened, and allow a minute or more to pass before swapping parts. Verify safe entry with an appropriate voltmeter. The REIL



Runway approach lighting on Brainerd Regional Airport

cabinet door should be padlocked for safety. Schroeder recommended consulting FAA AC 150/5340-26, *Maintenance of Airport Visual Aids*. "You can't go far enough to protect yourself," he said.

Finally, Schroeder touched on new technology, including LED (light emitting diode) illumination, which he said is still too expensive to purchase and maintain. Repair of an incandescent runway edge light could cost as little as \$7.50 for a lamp (fixtures are \$75 each), versus \$200-\$300 for the whole LED fixture replacement.

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