

AIR TAP Briefings

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

Spring 2009

Special Fall Forum Issue: This issue of AirTAP *Briefings* features extended coverage of the 2008 AirTAP Fall Forum, held October 15 and 16 in Breezy Point, Minnesota.

Annual Fall Forum highlights conflict resolution

About 80 people from general aviation airports and community government across Minnesota attended the fifth annual Airport Technical Assistance Program (AirTAP) Fall Forum, held October 15 and 16 at Breezy Point, Minn. Mindy Carlson, AirTAP program coordinator, gave the welcoming comments.



Gary Workman

In his opening remarks, Gary Workman, director of Mn/DOT's Office of Aeronautics, said a critical role of the forum is bringing aviation experts together to learn from one another. "There aren't really a lot of new, revolutionary solutions to our problems, but a lot of individuals have figured out ways to solve them," he said.

In 2008, Mn/DOT awarded an addi-

tional \$6 million above its normal grant amount to Minnesota's airports, Workman reported, but 2009 will be more challenging, as the state airport fund lost \$15 million when it was transferred to the state's general fund to help balance the budget.

Harold Van Leeuwen, chair of the Minnesota Council of Airports, urged attendees to advocate for their airports in the face of other competing interests. He said the average person doesn't see the true value of the airport and the local businesses it supports (UPS and FedEx, for example). "Use every tool you've got to maintain and preserve your airport and to maintain the safety and viability of the system," he said.

2008 Fall Forum Sessions

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

- Conflict Resolution and How to Negotiate and Mediate
- Above and Beyond—Monaco Air Duluth
- Emergency Preparedness
- How to Operate Your Airport Like a Business
- Roundtable Discussion on General Aviation Topics
- Cultivating Your Airport Commission
- Conversation with Jeff Hamiel
- Snow and Ice Operations at the Airport
- Airport Management 101
- Safe Airport Operations

Focus on mutual interests to solve problems, speaker says

Among the challenges airport operators face is getting two or more parties to agree on how to solve a particular problem. Mike Hughes, the opening plenary session speaker, offered suggestions to help airport operators negotiate and solve problems related to running their airports. Hughes is the director of the Center for Science and Public Policy at the Keystone Center in Keystone, Colorado, a nonprofit organization that mediates conflicts among public, private, and civic organizations.



Mike Hughes

Hughes drew several themes for his discussion from a book, *The Evolution of Cooperation* by Robert Axelrod, and a game known as "the prisoners' dilemma," in which players may choose to cooperate with or compete against others while trying to maximize their own individual payoff. After attendees participated in the game, Hughes explained how principles from the game apply to circumstances in which an individual can help someone and be helped equally, or a situation where an individual can hurt someone and themselves equally—such as negotiating a conflict. The first suggestion, Hughes said, is to start cooperatively. "It signals that you...can be trusted over time."

It's important, however, to show that if you are hurt, you will retaliate, Hughes said, since it's human nature to take advantage of people's vulnerabilities if they are

too obliging. At the same time, a player should show a willingness to be forgiving, too, he said.

Another concept to remember is to keep strategy simple. Participants will become frustrated with those who act in random ways without having a clear strategy—and consequently, will retaliate against them. This point may be especially relevant in Minnesota, Hughes said, which is often known for passive aggressiveness and a lack of openness. The lesson: "Communicate. Tell people what you're doing," he said.

The last lesson for cooperation is to send conciliatory messages, Hughes said. "By trying to win, people will want you to lose. The way to win is to sneak up on them by staying equal to them or one step behind."

When trying to solve a problem, people often get stuck because they focus on positions rather than interests, Hughes said. A position is a fixed outcome—"something you've decided is the necessary answer to a problem," he explained. An interest is the underlying need—the motivation for a position. If a problem can be reframed in terms of each parties' interests, a number of possible solutions beyond the original ideas become apparent.

"Often where we go wrong in negotiation is we jump to the end," Hughes said.

In this bottom-line thinking, if one party wins, then the other must lose. "Bottom-line thinking is taking a position," Hughes said. "Flexibility comes when you focus

on your interests." With interest-based thinking, he explained, the negotiating parties develop a mutual understanding of each other's needs, concerns, and goals and work together to build solutions that satisfy as many of those needs as possible. To encourage cooperative problem solving, Hughes suggested all parties focus on underlying interests, work toward outcomes where everyone gains, and communicate to defuse conflict early.

Hughes acknowledged that this is difficult, because individuals often refuse to see that others' interests are valid. Other factors that can influence the problem-solving process are differences in power, or perceived power, among the players, and whether the participants will ever work together again.

When coming together to try to solve a problem or negotiate a solution, it's important to establish ground rules on how the parties are going to behave, Hughes said. "It's...not true that we know what the rules are without saying what they are," he said.

If you get stuck in the process, one thing to check is whether some individuals are feeling disrespected. Other ideas Hughes offered include looking for procedural or psychological barriers, listening more, reducing blame, slowing down, and "mak[ing] room for people to say 'no,'" he said. The group might also try an interim or pilot solution as a start, which can be undone later if needed.

Airports play important role in serving public interest

Jeff Hamiel, executive director of the Metropolitan Airports Commission, returned to the forum to lead a discussion about public management issues related



Jeff Hamiel

to aviation around the state of Minnesota. He noted that in the current tough economy, communities might question why their airport is necessary and contemplate selling it to the city for redevelopment.

“We have a responsibility to the community, to ourselves, and to our airport...to do the best we can,” he said. “We can’t close airports. If we do, there’s a significant negative impact on our community—the community doesn’t realize what it will lose.”

Hamiel acknowledged that it’s difficult for small airports to make money. “We are public employees, we are not in this business for profitability,” he said. Those running public airports must ensure operations are safe, efficient, and financially viable while responding to a broad range of community interests and stakehold-

ers—the city council, mayor, citizens, and airport tenants, among others. “And we have to do it with one additional thing the private sector doesn’t have to deal with... a whole menagerie of regulations and policies and procedures that have been instituted by government,” Hamiel added.

Regulations govern runways, lighting, and obstructions, for example, for safety reasons. “This is part of the bureaucracy that has a negative connotation in our culture...but without [it], a lot of things that we take for granted as being safe and valuable...become dangerous and driven by other motivations,” Hamiel said. Public sector employees should be proud of their role and recognize that regulations are a tool to help them be good managers, he added.

Hamiel then touched on the topic of an earlier session on conflict resolution and mediation. When you’re dealing with a union, an employee group, a city council, or an airport board, it’s important to manage relationships properly and treat people fairly, to try to avoid formal communication processes such as mediation. “If you’re in touch with your people and

dealing with them on a regular basis, things usually come to light way before it becomes a problem,” he said.

Besides a troubled economy, Hamiel said poor customer service at U.S. airports is damaging the aviation industry. “Airports have got to become places where people come and expect to have positive, professional treatment,” Hamiel said. “We are serving their needs. The tax payer pays for the airport and pays the salary of public employees, whether it’s the airport manager or the customs border patrol or whomever it may be.”

In Europe and Asia, the airport employees include not only those who maintain the runway and terminal buildings but also those who handle ticketing, baggage, and servicing of aircraft, which gives the airport near total control over the passenger experience, Hamiel said. In contrast, a typical U.S. airport has control over about 30 percent of the passenger experience because the airlines, TSA, and border patrol handle other services. Improving customer service means getting buy-in from those other agencies, “and it’s tough to move those boulders,” he said.

Business touts customer service as competitive advantage

The first day’s luncheon featured Mike Magni, president of Monaco Air. About three years ago, Monaco Air took over as the fixed-base operator (FBO) at Duluth International Airport. In



Mike Magni

his introduction of Magni, Brian Ryks, executive director for the Duluth Airport Authority, said Monaco Air had brought about a “complete 180” with the business.

Among the services Monaco Air provides are fuel sales, aircraft maintenance, and catering. In addition, since the Duluth airport is located on the great circle route

between Europe and the western United States, Magni said the FBO is working to attract more international flights on “tech stops”—stops during which flights refuel and send passengers through U.S. customs. Monaco Air advertises a turn-around time of 30 minutes or less. “Once that aircraft lands, it’s like a NASCAR pit stop,” he said. “The whole intent is to get them on their way as quickly as possible.” This focus on “premier customer service” throughout the FBO is how Monaco Air hopes to differentiate itself from its competitors, Magni said. “Customer service is more meaningful than trying to compete on lowest price.”

Magni said Monaco invested time in observing, then defining, customer service expectations. The company takes care when hiring staff to ensure a good fit; it established a training program and mentors many staff throughout their careers. “These are the primary things to make sure we have the right culture in place,” he said.

That doesn’t mean everything always goes right, Magni added. And sometimes, the customer isn’t right. When that situation arises, however, “the customer should be satisfied that it was handled well,” he said.

Managers share thoughts on budgeting for small airports

Opening a session that covered airport management topics, Glen Burke, manager of South St. Paul Airport, offered insight into the budget process of a small airport. When putting his budget together, Burke first seeks input from his users—especially local and transient pilots and employees. He encouraged airport managers to ask staff what things the airport is lacking and what sort of issues are coming up, no matter how minor.

Estimating revenues can be challenging, Burke said—especially for airports with fuel systems. In addition to using history, Burke suggested talking with those who are selling the fuel for their expectations on prices. One reason South St. Paul operates

in the black, Burke said, is because it owns its fuel system, which generates significant revenue from the approximately 250,000 gallons of fuel it sells annually. The airport also benefits from its metro-area location (where it can charge more for rent) and from realizing some economies of scale.

At the end of each year, Burke’s staff conducts an annual audit to learn what they did well and what not so well in terms of budgeting and spending. “Your audit is a great source of historical information you can use well into the future,” he said.

Burke said he’s fortunate that the community is supportive of the airport, but spending sometimes comes down to a choice between hiring more police officers

or funding an airport project. “I try to sell that if we can do more at the airport, it will bring in some money to pay for that extra cop,” he said.

Brian Ryks, executive director for the Duluth Airport Authority, talked about the need for airports to have diversified revenue sources. Shortly after he arrived in Duluth, American Eagle discontinued service there. “The impact was devastating... in that it took about a quarter of a million dollars right then out of our budget that we had relied on,” he said. “That lesson told me we cannot rely on airline revenues during a very volatile time period, which we’ve seen since 9-11.”

Bringing Cirrus Design to town was “a
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Events, construction among safety issues at airports

In a session on safe operations, Brian Thompson, airport operations manager at Rochester International Airport (RST), began with an overview of RST's online field condition (FICON) reporting system, which has enabled RST to provide immediate and accurate reports on the condition of its pavements. This is especially important in winter months, Thompson said, when conditions can change quickly and often. Airport staff began pursuing online reporting about a year and a half ago. "We developed a system where the user interface is accessible from anywhere," Thompson said. RST staff have access to a laptop and wireless connection on the runway for reporting field conditions. The system was developed by Corporate Web Services Inc., which charges a set-up fee; other costs include monthly costs for hosting and storage of data.

Next, Joe Harris, manager of Flying Cloud and Anoka County/Blaine Airports, shared information for hosting safe airport events, which usually involve coordination with many different entities. In late summer of 2008, the Anoka County Airport played an important role during the Republican National Convention (RNC) and hosted a campaign visit by Sen. John McCain and Governor Sarah Palin.

Event planning takes a lot of time and commitment, Harris said. And the cost of hosting a special event often deters airports from doing so. Harris acknowledged that events often cost more money than they bring in. "However, if it brings more business to the airport, we gain. If it gets us positive press, we gain," he said.

Anoka/Blaine and Flying Cloud Airports benefited from the restrictions that were put on other areas of the metro area during the RNC. One of the FBOs did six months' worth of business over four days, he said. On the heels of the RNC came the McCain/Palin visit. "What I learned was that all the agencies involved only cared about their specific roles in the event. There were a lot of logistics they didn't consider and they weren't going to spend time figuring out."

In the time leading up to the event, the spectator estimate rose from 5,000



Brian Thompson



Joe Harris



Rick Braunig

to 8,000 (the actual number was about 14,500). Although Harris was worried about being able to accommodate all the cars and people unfamiliar with how to access the airport, the airport successfully did so, making some changes for the event that it's keeping in place.

Jesse Carriger, of the FAA's Minneapolis-St. Paul Airports District Office (ADO), said that airside construction safety is one of the most challenging issues for any size airport. A construction safety plan is required for each federally funded airfield construction project. This is a comprehensive plan, tailored to an individual project, that outlines how an airport operator will maintain safe operations while the airport remains open. The plan should be submitted to the FAA ADO at least 60 days prior to the start of a project. Construction safety phasing plans should address such items as scheduling, advanced notices to airfield personnel, location of material stockpiles, access routes to the site, and height restriction and setback distances for workers and equipment from aircraft movement areas.

"Coordinate with the users of the airport—make sure they understand what's going on and who's going to be out there," Carriger said.

And the airport should communicate and coordinate with the FAA about construction activities, he said. Among other safety considerations, Carriger said, are maintaining runway ends equal to what existed

before construction. Construction activities should be separated from the airfield, with barricades installed. In addition, airport operators should ensure aircraft can get through construction areas and know which areas are closed, he said.

Finally, Rick Braunig with Mn/DOT's Office of Aeronautics urged airport managers to pay as much attention to the grounds surrounding the runway as they do to the runway itself. For example, farming operations need to be closely monitored. Drivers of farm vehicles may be unfamiliar with the airport and may not know to look out for aircraft that they may only come across every few months.

Windmills are another concern, Braunig said, noting that in the last year, 1,000 applications were submitted for wind turbines. Carriger added that Part 77 was written to deal with land use next to the airport, which "does have a huge impact on aviation."

Braunig said that self-service fuel facilities have increased liability risks for airport owners. Where fueling facilities do exist, the airport operator should post signs telling users how to use the system, what to do and whom to call if they have a problem, and where the emergency shut-off is located.

Other suggestions Braunig offered included fixing pavement cracks promptly, which is "probably the worst of the safety issues that can happen to you," and making it obvious for visitors to the airport where to park in order to avoid movement surfaces.



In a session held at Brainerd Lakes Regional Airport, Paul Sichko (standing), assistant director for Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport maintenance and airside operations, Tony Myhra of Cryotech Deicing Technology, and Rick Braunig of Mn/DOT's Office of Aeronautics led a session on airport snow and ice removal.

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big risk that paid off," Ryks said. To do so, the city offered major financial incentives and community support, and put together varied and creative funding, for the company to relocate. Cirrus, now Duluth International's anchor tenant, employs 1,000 people in Duluth, has created spin-off businesses, and brings many customers to Duluth to spend money locally, among other economic benefits.

Monaco Air took over as the fixed-based operator at the airport about three years ago, in the process making significant investments in its facilities and equipment, improving customer service, and marketing its "tech stop" capabilities. The resulting increase in international

and charter traffic has had a major economic impact, Ryks said. The increase in the fuel flowage rate and increased activity at the airport have led to more revenue for the airport authority. The airport, with the help of the FAA and the state of Minnesota, also made significant investments in the FBO area including expanding the apron and putting in a new entrance road. Ryks said he views these improvements as "maximiz[ing] the use of high-demand property...to create additional capacity to generate further revenue."

Any size airport is a tremendous asset to its community, he said. A recent report by the Minnesota Department of Employment

and Economic Development found that Duluth's airport had a \$1.3 billion regional economic impact. Ryks said airports need to communicate this message to the public so they are viewed as a boon to economic development and job creation, and gateways to the world.

Airports should strive to build multiple partnerships—with economic development organizations, existing business, state and federal development agencies, and city, county, state, and federal delegations, among others. Small airports also benefit from having a champion, Ryks said—"someone out there selling the airport, spreading good will, addressing the negative impacts head-on and up-front."

Airports urged to plan for emergencies

The phrase “airport emergency” may bring to mind images of a dramatic crash, but emergency situations at an airport could just as likely result from a natural disaster or chemical spill—anything that requires an airport to take quick action to protect people and property. In this session, several airport managers shared steps they’ve taken to prepare for and manage different scenarios as well as to work with the numerous agencies involved.

Dave Beaver, manager of Owatonna Degner Regional Airport, has seen three accidents in the 12 years he’s been with Owatonna. Although Owatonna’s airport is not required by FAA regulations to have an emergency plan, Beaver believes it’s a good idea. “Each accident required some sort of action on the part of the airport. I think because we were prepared, that helped us respond,” he said. In addition to other planning, an airport should plan for how it will alert first responders and people at the airport and should be prepared for victims’ family members, counselors, onlookers, and others to come to the airport after an incident.

Steve Sievek, manager of Brainerd Lakes Regional Airport, said his airport’s emergency plan is more regulated and formal than many general aviation facilities. It requires the airport to conduct a full-scale accident drill every three years, with tabletop exercises conducted in the off years. “We have to continually update [it] so we can work with current personnel,” Sievek said, adding that of the 19 plan holders, each has a role to play in the plan.

Both Sievek and Shaun Germolus, manager of Chisolm-Hibbing Airport, said that problems often result from a breakdown in communication and coordination between responding agencies. “A while ago, police told me they weren’t that comfortable coming out to the airport,” Germolus said. Things such as locked gates and access points contribute to that problem, he said.

Sievek said his airport invites the first-



Dave Beaver, Steve Sievek, and Gary Ulmen

line responders out to the airport for an orientation, where they can learn how to get access when needed and better define their roles. He is also proposing conducting off-site incident training this year, because most accidents occur off the airport—and off the runway, such as in a field or woods.

Protecting a crash site is critical, Sievek said—which for a large aircraft could extend from 50 feet to 500 yards. In some cases, people may be trying to help but in doing so are moving things out of position or tracking around the site. “You have to do the best job you can to not alter anything—that’s really the goal,” he said, especially if the Transportation Security Administration will be investigating. If possible, someone on staff should photograph the entire scene and its components. Local law enforcement may also be able to help protect a scene.

Gary Ulmen, manager of Eveleth-Virginia Airport, said fire protection for his airport is provided by the township and two neighboring cities, while police protection is provided by three different government entities. The local fire department conducts drills at the airport. The plane crash that killed Senator Paul Wellstone in 2002 was the highest profile accident to happen in

the vicinity of his airport, and Ulmen said he still fields calls about it.

After an incident, an airport operator should expect that it will take time to get the airport up and running again—from two days to a week or more, Sievek said, and investigations of accidents can take longer.

If an airport currently doesn’t have any plan for responding to emergencies, FAA Advisory Circular 150/5200-31A, *Airport Emergency Plan*, is a good place start, Germolus added. He also recommended that airport managers create a short checklist for all airport staff as well as the fixed-based operators. “When things are chaotic you can grab this checklist and provide some structure during the event for those front-line staff,” he said.

Save the date: 2009 AirTAP Fall Forum

The 2009 AirTAP Fall Forum will be held September 28 and 29 at the Holiday Inn in Mankato, Minnesota (www.holidayinn.com/mankatomn). Please note the new location for this year’s event.

We’ll keep you updated and post details on the AirTAP Web site as information becomes available.

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