



AIRCRAFT OWNERS AND PILOTS ASSOCIATION

421 Aviation Way • Frederick, MD 21701-4798
Telephone (301) 695-2000 • Fax (301) 695-2375
www.aopa.org

June 12, 2006

Mr. Jim Broadwell
Jekyll Island-State Park Authority
381 Riverview Drive
Jekyll Island, GA 31527

Re: Jekyll Island Airport (09J) RFI

Dear Mr. Broadwell:

On behalf of the 408,000 Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) members – including nearly 12,000 in the State of Georgia – we are writing to indicate our strong support for continued operation of the Jekyll Island Airport (09J) as a publicly owned, public-use airport. The Jekyll Island-State Park Authority (JIA or Authority) letterhead refers to Jekyll Island as “Georgia’s Jewel.” Your wonderful airport only adds value to that jewel. As we have indicated in our past correspondence to Bill Donohue, AOPA believes there are multitudes of options for the airport that will compliment and likely even strengthen plans to develop the island’s tourism potential.

As you know, several island-area communities in the Southeast have embraced the revenue potential of local airports and developed them with a focus on services that will attract long and short-term visitors and thereby increase revenue. With this in mind, we were distressed to see language included in the 2005 Draft Island Development Plan / Design Guidelines document which suggest other uses for the land now occupied by the airport. Page 12 of the document refers to the airport as “a seldom used airstrip” while page 13 suggests the airport could be converted to accommodate other more tourist-attracting facilities such as residential units. It is our firm belief that redeveloping the airport for other non-aviation purposes would not be in the best interest of residents, visitors to Jekyll Island, and JIA.

An airport is much like an interstate highway. It is an on and off ramp to the local community and part of a national transportation system. Many communities view their local airport as an access point to the world. One mile of highway takes you one mile but a mile of runway takes you anywhere in the world.

Jekyll Island is ideally situated to take a unique approach to the “island airport” model. For example, airports such as Charleston Executive (JZI) and East Cooper Airport (8S5), which serve Kiawah Island and Isle of Palms respectively, both require hired transportation in excess of 5 miles to island destinations such as hotels and restaurants. Conversely, Malcolm McKinnon Airport on St. Simons (SSI) is less than a mile or two to major attractions, some of which offer their own transportation. Both Kiawah and Isle of Palms lack the benefit of having an existing airport but thrive due to proximity to Charleston. St. Simons has blossomed in recent years thanks to development that is complimented by the existing airport. Like St. Simons, Jekyll Island has one chance to capitalize on its existing airport as a resource. Unlike Kiawah and Isle of Palms, the case for Jekyll is contingent upon self-sufficiency, not co-dependency on a neighboring city.

Mr. Jim Broadwell
Page 2
June 12, 2006

As you likely know, the Georgia Department of Transportation has already granted 09J permission to sell fuel; so one key component is in place. Furthermore, the FAA has recognized that improvement projects may arise at 09J and estimates \$800,000 in airport improvements eligible for federal funds through 2009, thereby covering these immediate and simple revenue generators as well as future additions. AOPA was instrumental in adding language to the FAA Reauthorization bill for AIP funds to be spent on hangars and fuel farms that were previously not eligible for AIP funding and we would like to offer our assistance in obtaining these should the Authority wish to do so.

AOPA also recommends encouraging local businesses to establish a presence at the airport. This may include car/bike rentals on site and/or "jitney" bus services to local hotels, golf courses, and other attractions. The JIA's master plan planning process provides an ideal opportunity to evaluate and implement tourism services that will maximize the airport's ability to attract short and long-term visitors and facilitate their stays on Jekyll Island.

Accommodating the "on the ground" needs of these transient and possibly long-term resident pilots, Jekyll Island could position itself as a pilot-friendly community and receive the benefits of revenue produced in this lucrative area. Of course, offering services to accommodate based aircraft complement the higher dollar market the Authority hopes to appeal to in its future development of the island. The United States Department of Commerce has developed an economic impact model for application to general aviation airports. Called RIMSII, the model accurately reflects that for every \$1.00 generated on an airport, another \$2.53 is generated in the surrounding community.

The true value of Jekyll Island Airport isn't measured in bottom-line dollars. The value is measured as part of the sum of transportation facilities that make Jekyll Island available to the public. At times, the airport might well be the only way to access the island for emergency situations and it will definitely be the quickest route.

Thank you for considering our comments on the continued viability of Jekyll Island Airport. AOPA would be pleased to work with you and others in the community as you further refine the Island's Master Plan and supporting documents. Please feel free to contact us at 301.695.2205.

Sincerely,



Bill Dunn
Vice President Airports
Aircraft Owners & Pilots Association

CC: Governor Sonny Perdue, State of Georgia
Bob Minter, AOPA Southeast Regional Representative
Lynne Birmingham, AOPA Airport Support Network Volunteer
Edward Ratigan, Manager, Georgia Dept. of Transportation
Noel Holcomb, Commissioner, Georgia Dept. of Natural Resources