



AIRCRAFT OWNERS AND PILOTS ASSOCIATION

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February 23, 2007

The Honorable Richard (Mike) Myers
Mayor
City Hall
344 "H" Street
Blaine, WA 98230

Dear Mayor Myers:

In October of last year the Blaine City Council voted to keep the city's airport open. Now, less than 4 months later, the City Council has before it a proposed ordinance (07-2658) to close the airport by the end of 2008 or sooner. The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA), representing 411,000 members nationwide, nearly 12,000 who reside in Washington state, is strongly opposed to this latest initiative and urge rejection of the proposed ordinance.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), has advised us in numerous discussions that the agency is supportive of the City's future vision for the airport as outlined in the master plan. You and your colleagues should understand that support in the context of how the FAA's Airport Improvement Program (AIP) works. The FAA typically allocates AIP funds over a period of years, rather than making the total amount of planned airport improvements available as a lump sum - in your case \$16 million. This approach by the agency is applied consistently to all airport development projects funded through AIP all across the United States.

Blaine Municipal Airport is an important part of the Washington State airport system, providing general aviation access to northern Whatcom County. The FAA deems it important enough to designate it for funding by including it in the National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS). Only selected general aviation airports are eligible for inclusion, and therefore eligible for federal funding. In fact, this inclusion allows the City to leverage 95% of improvement project costs via state and federal funds.

The airport will become increasingly important as changes occur in how Blaine deals with travel, business and predicted population growth. General aviation access to the area will shift much further south to Bellingham should the airport close. Unfortunately, increases in commercial operations at Bellingham International Airport will negatively impact general aviation operations without Blaine as a reliever.

Blaine's Airport is an international landing facility, serving the needs of U.S. aircraft coming back into the United States from Canada as well as Canadian aircraft and tourists

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heading south to enjoy Washington and the rest of the country. According to the Department of Commerce's RIMS-II model, for every dollar spent on the airport, visitors to the airport spend \$2.53 off the airport. That money and the ability to attract it will be gone if the airport is closed. According to FAA records, 2/3's of the operations at your airport are "itinerant" operations. That equates to visitors who are spending their money in your town.

AOPA strongly urges the City Council to reject proposed ordinance 07-2658 and allow the airport to be all that it can be as a valuable contributor to the local economy. A mile of highway only takes you a mile, but a mile of runway takes you to the world. I am certain you wouldn't consider closing a highway exit ramp into your city. An airport is a local city's entry point to an interstate highway system – but in the air.

Thank you for your consideration of the Association's views on this important subject. We truly hope you and the Council will recognize that Blaine Airport is a diamond in the rough that can indeed be polished over time to be the shining gem of your community.

If we can be of further assistance please contact our staff at 301-695-2200.

Sincerely,



Bill Dunn
Vice President
Airports

cc:

Mrs. Bonnie Onyon, Mayor Pro Tem, Blaine City Council
Mr. Ken Ely, Blaine City Council
Mr. John Liebert, Blaine City Council
Mr. Jason Overstreet, Blaine City Council
Mr. Bruce Wolf, Blaine City Council
Mr. Charlie Hawkins, Blaine City Council
Mr. Gary Tomsic, City Manager
Mr. John Siblod, Director, Washington State Bureau of Aviation
Mr. Wade Bryant, Manager, FAA Seattle Airports District Office
Mr. Jim Smith, President, Washington Pilots Association
Mr. Mike Ferguson, AOPA Northwest Regional Representative
Mr. Clarence Ranck, AOPA Airport Support Network Volunteer 4W6