

Aviation Advisory Board Meeting Minutes
December 8, 2020
Webex Meeting

Meeting called to order by Chairman Lee Ryan at 1:36 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS:

Board Members Present: Steve Strait, Lee Ryan, Gideon Garcia, Mike Reeve, Frank Neitz, Bob Kaufman, Dennis Parrish, Jim Dodson, Marilyn Romano, Mike Stedman, Bob Hajdukovich

DOT&PF: Deputy Commissioner John Binder; Division Operations Manager Troy LaRue; Development Specialist Linda Bustamante; ANC Airport Manager Jim Szczesniak; Central Region Aviation Design Chief Luke Bowland; Statewide Aviation Transportation Planner Rebecca Douglas; Southcoast Region Director Lance Mearig; AIAS Transportation Planner Jodi Gould; Commissioner John MacKinnon; Statewide Aviation Policy Planner Rich Sewell; Fairbanks Int'l. Airport Manager Angie Spear; Central Region Director Wolfgang Junge; Special Assistant to Commissioner Andy Mills.

FAA: Kristi Warden, Director Alaska Region Airports

OTHERS: Tom George, Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA); Adam White, Alaska Airmen's Association; Mary Bondurant, Kenai Airport Mgr.; Jane Dale, Alaska Air Carriers Association; Ralph Gibbs, Merrill Field Airport; Earl Samuelson, former AAB member; Melissa Osborn, DOWL

AGENDA and MINUTES – Jim Dodson moved to accept agenda; Bob Kaufman seconded. Jim moved to adopt September meeting minutes; Bob seconded. Motions passed unanimously. Approved September meeting minutes posted to [website](#).

Commissioner John MacKinnon Comments:

Thanked Mike Stedman for keeping air service open to Haines especially during the severe rainfall Southeast is experiencing. The Governor will be delivering the budget this Friday. DOT&PF's budget should be OK especially thanks to the one-time CARES Act Funding that came through the FAA. This funding was a great help to the department for this year's budget and next. Looking at the last 6-7 years of DOT's Maintenance and Operations budget there has been a reduction of \$23M and that equates to 72 fewer equipment operators and the closing of 5 ½ highway maintenance stations. 26% of the M&O budget comes from motor fuel tax revenues. The legislature has looked at increasing motor fuel taxes to adequately fund M&O. Alaska has the lowest motor fuel tax in the country. Thanked Marilyn Romano, Bob Hajdukovich, and Gideon Garcia for continuing to serve on the Aviation Advisory Board.

ANC Airport Update:

Airport Manager Jim Szczesniak provided the board a power point presentation:

- ANC is excited to be rolling out a new website that is customer and user friendly and optimized for cell phones.
- Development projects are underway at the airport – FedEx has \$26M of ramp work underway and UPS is expanding into the north area of the airport.

- Alaska Cargo and Cold Storage continuing with lease negotiations. This project will help with exporting perishables.
- 6A - construction prep has started.
- Recently public noticed an application for a project to develop a hangar and cargo facilities in South Airpark by IC Alaska. There is also potential for an MRO facility.
- New USDOT passenger transfer rights approved for this airport. This could give passenger air carriers incentive to stop international passenger flights in ANC and increase belly cargo revenue.

FAI Airport Update:

Airport Manager Angie Spear provided the following update:

Air Service Development – the airport is working to build up passenger service at FAI and met with multiple carriers in October. American Airlines plans to launch next summer. United Airlines and Condor are considering starting up service again pending decisions of the cruise industry.

COVID 19 Impacts - passenger traffic is down 50-55% year-over-year. Covid testing continues inside the terminal adjacent to Baggage Claim 2. Testing is also occurring in Lot D that is free to the public and is offered 7 days per week. Advanced cleaning and sanitizing protocols are in place to mitigate risk to pax and employees.

Airport Development - Omni Logistics/Arctic Sands have constructed a “Boutique” hangar on the West Ramp that should be completed by early spring. Construction cost \$7M. **Life-Med** initiated construction for an air ambulance hangar/facility on West Ramp. Estimated completion date is end of summer 2021. Construction cost \$6M. **Alaska Aerofuel** is installing additional 30,000 gallon fuel tank. **Airframes, Inc.** has submitted an application to build a manufacturing facility for aircraft arctic components on East Ramp.

Airport Projects – installation of a new escalator is scheduled to begin in February and should be completed by fall. Ruwnay 2R/20L reconstruction project expected to begin in late May 2021. PFAS remediation – water service connections completed to 98 residents in the plume area. Firing Training Pit remediation is complete and final water emptied this summer. Airport is researching the replacement of ARFF trucks as funding becomes available. Firing Range Remediation – excavation, transport, and disposal of contaminated materials to a Cat. C landfill in the lower 48.

DC Binder Update

AIAS statistics – reviewed slides showing cargo activity increases and the slow recovery of passenger enplanements. Combined Passenger and Cargo activity up 15% for the year driven by cargo. Passenger traffic is down, currently 55-60% below normal for this time of year.

North Slope Borough and Barrow/Pt. Hope Airports - the department is working with the NSB to transfer ownership of the Barrow and Pt. Hope Airports. The process is moving along but it will take some time. The borough is working closely with the tribe in Pt. Hope but there is more involved with transferring the Barrow Airport because it is a federal action and includes environmental and NEPA actions.

Sand Point Landing Fees – the Sand Point Airport was changed to a Part 139 certificated airport with landing fees implemented to help cover the cost of the newly added firefighting and rescue equipment and employees.

After PenAir discontinued serving the community it was decided to keep SDP as a certificated airport and leave landing fees in place until it's determined if the new air carrier RAVN confirms if the need for ARFF. The FY20 M&O airport expenses and leasing revenues at DOT airports was distributed noting that SDP leasing revenue does not include landing fees.

Legislative Overview – the department is not aware of any upcoming aviation legislation at this time. The aviation fuel tax may come up again.

COVID and DOT&PF Maintenance Stations – there is concern with essential workers at DOT maintenance stations and potential covid outbreaks. Recently the crew at the Cold Bay Airport came down with mild Covid symptoms. DOT was able to keep the airport open with limited ARFF capabilities. There was good communication between the airport and airline customers.

Design Aircraft and Impact to Airfields – Luke Bowland talked about changes in western Alaska aircraft operations specifically those communities that hub out of Bethel and Dillingham. Many of these runways are designed for Design Group I aircraft and there is a pattern of larger Design Group II aircraft (Cessna Caravan) using them. Additional runway requirements and increased costs will occur if these runways need to be configured to a larger design group of aircraft. The FAA is working with department to address this.

Klawock Airport Wildlife Hazard Assessment – Rich Sewell advised the board that the contractor, Loomacres, is onsite as of November 1st for a one year assessment of wildlife at this airport. At the end of the contract the department will receive a wildlife management plan to go forward with mitigation efforts at this airport.

Public Comment:

Former board member Earl Samuelson asked about the Y-K runways. The majority of the runways are less than 3,000 feet and he believes they should be extended to 4-5,000 ft. and that accident rates could go down with longer runways. With the increase in cargo at ANC are there any plans to upgrade Bethel runway? DC Binder said the department is always watching the activity at airports and basing future capital projects on the needs of that airport. At the rural airports longer runways are better but in order to get funding there needs to be justification to the FAA.

Earl also talked about the impact Covid is having in the Y-K region. Travelers are being tested in Anchorage but not getting results back before arriving in BET or other villages, and then discovering they are positive 5 days later. There needs to be tighter guidelines and controls and more rapid testing. Lee mentioned that both Nome and Kotzebue are doing rapid tests for all passengers arriving off of mainline flights and then are required to test again in 5 days.

FAA Alaska Region Airports update – Kristi Warden said the Alaska Region's AIP (Airport Improvement Program) that provides funding for Alaska airports is anticipated to be fully allocated for FY21 and FY22. She would like to see additional funding such as another stimulus package, supplemental funding, or Cares Act to address the airport infrastructure needs in Alaska. Her office understands the shifting needs of the Sand Point Airport and will be flexible with the department as changes to the Part 139 status may occur. Her office nominated Tom George for the Airport Ally Award and was selected for the Office of Airports nationally. It's an opportunity to acknowledge Tom for the great partnership and his strong advocacy to the FAA's Office of Airports, and to general aviation throughout Alaska.

Board Discussion

Tom George asked about the handout of the diagram of runway length and lighting? Troy advised that SWA is doing a statewide look at runway lighting systems across the state and determining what the needs are today. Lee requested more information at a future meeting. Earl commented on the chart and noted that a lot of the shorter runways are in the Y-K.

Resolution 2020-2 (Increase Passenger Air Travel Confidence and Commerce in Rural Communities during COVID-19 Pandemic).

The board continues to highly encourage scheduled carriers to require masks. A state mandate requiring a mask would help many communities for direction with travel mandates.

Earl commented that locally in the Y-K there are mandates for mask wearing and most people are complying. Bethel didn't take action until cases increased. Bethel was waiting for the State to make mask mandates and there was a lack of communication until it was cleared up that a community can make these recommendations. Steve pointed out that unorganized boroughs under the constitution are run by the legislature. It would be their job to issue mandates for unorganized boroughs.

Bypass Mail – Chairman Lee Ryan gave the board a draft of the bypass mail opinion piece about the importance of bypass mail in Alaska. It was decided by the board to have a letter ready for future attacks against the Bypass Mail program but not to issue anything at this time.

Troy mentioned the effectiveness of videos produced by the Aviation System Plan and will work with board members on producing a bypass mail video.

Lee is going to rewrite the opinion piece with recommendations provided by board members.

Board Comments –

Bob Hajdukovich reported on USDOT data from August that showed mail is up 20% overall but passenger activity is down 70%. Not sure if that number will fully recover when travel returns to the 'new normal'. Runway lengths and standards of safety are critical at rural runways and need to be monitored. The safety standards for passenger carriers should be applied to cargo carriers operating Caravan aircraft. That airplane costs \$2.5M.

Mike Stedman commented on weather in Southeast Alaska – he has lived there for 62 years and never before seen the amount of rain and continuous wind for over a week. It will take a long time for Haines to recover but people are pulling together and providing help and donations.

Marilyn Romano said that Alaska Airlines is working closely with community health clinics and getting messages out to people about how they should be traveling to small communities with the rise in covid cases. It will help with Governor's mandate requesting testing before passengers travel to rural hub communities.

Steve Strait said the Sand Lake Community Council had a very active meeting about the proposed airport development across the street from a residential neighborhood. Kudos to the airport planners for fielding questions for about three hours.

The Port of Alaska reported that the budget allocation for fees for tankers carrying kerosene for ANC is 25% ahead of where they were last year.

Bob Kaufman talked about concerns for next summer's tourism season with covid issues and enough airline capacity to support the summer tourism season. There needs to be sensible protocol in place to support tourism companies. This is an important discussion for the next AAB meeting and will be added to the agenda.

Next meeting planned for February. Board will be polled to determine best date to schedule.

Meeting adjourned 3:56 p.m.