

## **AAAE Responds To Misleading Article On Value Of Small Airports**

□ *September 17, 2009* □ AAEE Thursday expressed its disappointment with the misleading portrayal of smaller airports in a *USA Today* feature article. Responding to the article "Feds Keep Little-Used Airports In Business," AAEE President Charles Barclay noted that focusing on a handful of anecdotes creates an overly broad, inaccurate picture of the value of investing in our nation's airport system.

"There are thousands of smaller airports that were not profiled in the article that could undoubtedly demonstrate an extraordinary return on federal investment in terms of added economic activity for their community - a multiplier effect routinely acknowledged by economists," Barclay wrote *USA Today* editors in a letter responding to the article. "Federal investments through the Airport Improvement Program also ensure the safety of airport facilities and have been critical in building a system of reliever airports in major metropolitan areas that dramatically reduce delays at larger commercial facilities. Smaller airports often provide rural communities with their only access to the national aviation system and increasingly are used for emergency medical transportation throughout the country."

Barclay also noted that the nation's auditor -- the Government Accountability Office -- has concluded that general aviation airports bring numerous benefits to the national airspace system. Among them: reducing congestion at busy commercial service airports; improving air transportation for local communities; providing key staging grounds for responding to natural disasters and civil defense; and providing access to the national airspace system from rural areas. In addition, FAA has noted that general aviation airports are the closest source of air transportation for about 19 percent of the population, Barclay pointed out.

"While a strong argument can be made in favor of airport investment on a case-by-case basis, the fact is that the value of federal investment in airports cannot be measured by looking at one airport or even a handful of airports in a vacuum. Rather, the value lies in the maintenance of national system of airports - a system that benefits all Americans whether they live in Wolf Point, Montana, or New York," Barclay said. "Policymakers have long recognized the benefit of a strong national transportation system - in airports and elsewhere - and have invested accordingly. In fact, when Congress and President Eisenhower committed to building the interstate highway system,

they did so to benefit the entire country, not just the largest communities where economic measurement was the greatest. The benefit was the transportation network, not stand alone cost-benefit analysis of each point along the network.

"Our nation enjoys the safest, most efficient, and most extensive aviation system in the world," Barclay continued. "It would be a mistake to take any action to diminish our standing based on the snapshot presented in this article."

The *USA Today* article focused on airports eligible for AIP funding. The current National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems lists 3,356 airports that are eligible for AIP funding; *USA Today* based its article on anecdotes from only 10 of these airports.

A copy of Barclay's letter is available at [http://www.aaae.org/pdf/govpdf/20090917\\_ga\\_airports\\_letter.pdf](http://www.aaae.org/pdf/govpdf/20090917_ga_airports_letter.pdf)

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