

To Whom It May Concern:

As I read, listen and study the facts of airport improvement I am more and more convinced that anyone in opposition to the improvement of Ravalli County's struggling airport is either misinformed or is opposed to economic viability of this community. I will explain my findings and challenge any civil discussion of fact to show differently.

1.) Homes located south of and affected by the airport.

There are a number of homes located south of the airport. I have read, discussed and listened to the concerns of people in that location. The preferred option 4 moves the runway 400 feet east and 1500 feet north distancing aircraft approach and takeoff considerably from these homes. By not moving the runway, discontent and the undermining of safety in these areas will continue. Option 4 will also remove the air traffic pattern from over the High School. The increase in runway length allows greater distance between aircraft and the homes to the south. It is hard to determine why any of these people living in these locations would not be pro airport expansion.

2.) Concern of additional traffic.

The concern of additional traffic does not have much merit. I have tracked and referenced the number of aircraft that were scheduled to land at Hamilton that had to divert to Missoula because of poor weather and or runway length. I tracked this during the high summer season and it was only around 10-15 all season. The point being, that the people and their aircraft wanting to come to the Bitterroot Valley are already coming here. The small amount that have had to divert in the past would no longer divert due to the longer runway resulting in only minimal increase in air traffic. As a county, we have a duty to provide safety margins required by these planes and protect our liability. Current runway length is 4200 feet. New runway length will be 5200 feet.

3.) Runway length increasing aircraft size.

The length of the runway affects the aircraft that divert for weather or heat. Many aircraft are able to land at Hamilton but lack runway length to takeoff at gross weight. The result are aircraft that land in Hamilton, but then don't remain to purchase fuel, go into town, stay overnight and utilize and support our other businesses in Hamilton and surrounding areas. The increase to 5200 feet would allow for these aircraft to land, purchase fuel and other local goods and services by mitigating the diversion of planes to Missoula. Size of aircraft landing in Hamilton will **NOT** increase! The current size of the runway already allows up to a maximum size of aircraft capable of landing here. The increased size of runway will not increase this standard, but it will allow for 100 percent of the aircraft already landing at Hamilton to land within their operating safety range. In Ravalli County,

more than 50 percent is Forest Wild Land Interface. Fire fighting activities have been hampered by runway inadequacy and length causing these aircraft to haul smaller loads and in some instances dump retardant on take off in order to clear obstacles. Runway expansion and improvement will provide decreased liability to our county, greater fire protection and fire fighting capabilities, and will increase economic value to the community.

4.) Cost of airport improvements and who pays.

Monies are collected by the FAA from the sale of aviation fuel and airline ticket sales. The FAA has a trust account that uses these funds to maintain airports and in Ravalli County's case will fund 90 percent of the project. Ravalli County has a Safety Foundation set up to allow for money to be donated to fund the other 10 percent. All taxpayers in Ravalli County will not have to pay anything for airport improvements and will get the benefit of a multi-million dollar project in this community. However, if the expansion does not move forward at this time, the FAA will move on and use the monies to fund other airport improvements not in our area. Now is the time for the people of Ravalli County to support this expansion. Our community as a whole will realize many benefits that come from this fundamental piece of infrastructure.

There is so much propaganda and misinformation floating around regarding this airport improvement. The facts are that Ravalli County has the BUSIEST General Aviation Airport in Montana. It is in the bottom tier when it comes to maintenance and safety standards. We have a beautiful valley that attracts all types of people. Some come by car, bike, airplane, or on foot. Infrastructure affects everyone, and our airport is vital to our community. The facts will speak for themselves. This airport should be embraced and allowed to thrive here. It is a benefit to all in some way and will improve viability of our community and valley.

It is time that the commissioners and the citizens of this community have the courage to stand up for what is right and best for the county as a whole. We, as citizens and especially our Commissioners have a responsibility to support, strengthen and protect the assets of our community.

I have reviewed this EA (Environmental Assessment) and find no quantifiable reason not to accept the expansion and move forward with the preferred option 4. The EA is very thorough and address these issues effectively. I support without any reservation the expansion and improvement of Ravalli County Airport. Join Me.

Regards,

Brian R. Hawkes
Citizen, Business Owner, Tax Payer, Private Pilot.