

Glenda Wiles

From: Alke, Debbie <dalke@mt.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, July 23, 2014 11:18 AM
To: Glenda Wiles
Cc: dan@RPA-hln.com; David R. Hedditch; fredflys@yahoo.com
Subject: Ravalli County Airport

Importance: High

Dear Commissioners:

I am writing you on behalf of the State of Montana to voice our support for the preferred alternative, Alternative 4B, as identified in the Ravalli County Airport Draft Environmental Assessment. The document does a good job exploring resources and potential impacts to the airport and surrounding area. Selection of the preferred alternative will provide numerous significant advantages including:

- **Increased Operational Safety**
 - Extending the runway to 5,200 ft. will provide an added margin of safety for all fixed-wing aircraft conducting takeoff and landing operations.
 - Meeting the FAA required runway separation standard will provide for safer operations of all aircraft.
- **Increased Economic Benefit**
 - Extending the runway to 5,200 ft. will allow 100% of the small aircraft fleet to utilize the airport thus making the airport available to a wider user base which promotes business opportunity for the community.
- **Increased Services**
 - Extending the runway to 5,200 ft. will increase the fire suppression capability of fixed-wing firefighting aircraft by allowing heavier loads to take-off.
 - Extending the runway to 5,200 ft. will allow a wider variety of fixed-wing medical flight aircraft to serve the community.

In addition, the Ravalli County Airport is an important part of the National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS) which contains all commercial service airports, all reliever airports, and selected general aviation airports. As such, the Ravalli County Airport is deemed significant to national air transportation. With 91 based aircraft and over 23,600 annual operations, the airport is a valuable part of the local infrastructure.

There's a strong correlation between socio-economic growth and the need for adequate aviation facilities and services. To that end, the State of Montana partners with the FAA to promote aviation and aviation facilities. Since 1997, the State of Montana has made a significant investment in the Ravalli County Airport by awarding \$148,563 in State grant money and \$218,833 in State loan money. Both the FAA and the State of Montana award funding through a needs-based competitive process. The goal for both agencies is to distribute all available funding for eligible airport improvement projects. For the Ravalli County Airport, the FAA is planning to provide funding for 90% of the eligible expenses associated with this project. The taxpayers of Ravalli County are only responsible for 10¢ of every dollar spent on the project – a great value by any measure. In addition, the State of Montana strives to assist communities with meeting their 10% local match responsibility. In many cases, the communities "out of pocket" expense are even less than 10¢ of every dollar spent thus further increasing the value to the local taxpayer.

The Ravalli County Airport has not received FAA funding for the past 3 years due to the absence of a plan to meet separation standards between the runway and taxiway. It's important to realize if the airport does not move forward with a plan to meet the separation standard, the FAA will not provide funding for the runway. Non-participation by the FAA would correlate to a 90% shortfall of all future project funding and would force some tough decision. Regardless of the decisions made, this situation will be a lose-lose for the community and produce a tremendous burden on the local taxpayers.

The State of Montana is charged with "providing for the protection and promotion of safety in aeronautics". It is for this reason, I urge consideration of Alternative 4B to be deemed in the best interest of the public.

Sincerely,

Debbie Alke

Administrator, Aeronautics Division

Montana Department of Transportation

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