

July 24, 2014

Daniel M. Norderud
AICP, Environmental Studies Division Manager
Robert Peccia & Associates Inc.
P.O. Box 5653
Helena, MT 59604

Re: Opposition to the Proposed Expansion of the Hamilton Airport

I am writing to express my opposition to the proposed expansion of the airport in Ravalli County. I have lived in the Bitterroot Valley for over 30 years. There are so many problems with the proposed expansion --

In 2011, after years of hearings and hundreds of thousands of dollars of studies, the FAA approved a simple fix of the safety concerns at the airport at minimal to no cost to the County. And in 2003 the county commission passed a resolution giving county residents the right to vote before any contract was let to extend the runway. Now, the County Commission is rescinding those community decisions.

The FAA would now only pay for 90% of approved costs, about \$7 million, and the cost is likely to increase substantially because the current estimates omit many aspects of the job and underestimate the costs for those aspects. This \$7, 000,000 would help less than a hundred local airplane owners, and increase the taxes of all the County taxpayers.

Although the Airport Safety Foundation, a group of six appointed and unincorporated folks, has said it will pay for the County's share of costs, there is no guarantee that this would happen.

To comply with FAA requirements, the County would likely to have to zone property to preclude lawsuits over property value diminution from noise and pollution. The County doesn't have zoning authority. The County would have to purchase a minimum of 131 acres from the Valley's largest private landowner, and he had indicated that he wants \$30,000 an acre for no less than 600 acres. The County indicates that it is about to approve the property purchase price as \$8,000 per acre for 131 acres. This would mean the County taxpayers would likely be expected to pay the difference.

In order to qualify with the FAA as an airport requiring a longer runway, and more separation between runway and taxiway, than our historically adequate one, there would have to be a minimum of 500 annual landings and takeoffs of larger turboprops and jets (so-called "B-II" aircraft). In fact, the airport's own records reflect that this number has decreased over the past ten years to about 390. The draft EA states that a longer runway would allow heavier loads in firefighting planes. Over the years, the average load of slurry in the County is seven pounds less than that taking off from Missoula.

Any increase in traffic at the County airport would be in the turboprop and larger corporate jets, not in the small single engine planes now using the airport. The larger planes are much noisier than the small

Cessnas and pollute a lot more – air pollution and noise pollution. It could mean 6,000 more landings and takeoffs by mostly large corporate jets each year in the near future.

The County implies that the airport is a “type B-II” airport, if so, then the runway is 40 feet too close to the taxiway; the taxiway is five feet too narrow; and a hanger was permitted to be built in 2008 (with the knowledge of the FAA) too close to the taxiway.

In addition, when a person’s property values are diminished by action of a governmental agency, the governmental agency (read: Ravalli County) is liable for the damages. The FAA and other local governments throughout the country have lost millions of dollars in lawsuits on this very issue. So the taxpayers of Ravalli County would also be liable to pay for losses in value to surrounding properties.

Neither the local Chamber of Commerce nor the economic development authority can remember anytime in recent history when a potential new business prospect raised an issue about the length of the airport runway.

Lack of appropriate analysis – what is really needed is a full Environmental Impact Study. But that will take years and cost hundreds of thousands of dollars on top of the years and hundreds of thousands of dollars already spent on this issue. If the runway were simply left at 4200 feet and moved slightly, there could be no more EA’s, no EIS, no more delay.

There is little justification for expanding the airport. Expanding for the benefit of large aircraft owners at the expense of the health of residents located near and in the rest of the valley is not acceptable. Additionally, the economic depreciation of residential property directly underneath or adjacent to the flight track of departing/approaching jet aircraft as well as along take off and approach patterns (pollution and esthetics) is all the more reason the expansion should not be approved.

With the current national economic cutbacks in Federal funding, to approve this type of development would seem to be fundamentally irresponsible.

Ravalli County already suffers from air pollution. In the EA fourteen areas are stated ‘NON-ATTAINMENT AREAS’; these areas are determined by the negative health effects of air pollution. Ravalli County is in an inversion valley subject to concentrations of pollutants particularly during the winter. (Note that many of the non attainment areas are located in what is described as the “Glacier” region.). At minimum, an air pollution and noise pollution inventory should have been completed around the airport, and in each city in the valley prior to further consideration of the proposal.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Lu Terry
PO Box 381
Stevensville, MT. 59870

Glenda Wiles

From: Lu Terry <snowy@mtwi.net>
Sent: Friday, July 25, 2014 10:24 AM
To: dan@rpa-hln.com
Cc: Glenda Wiles
Subject: Attention: Ravalli County Airport
Attachments: Airport-Hamilton-letter-072414.doc

I am writing to express my opposition to the proposed expansion of the Ravalli County Airport -- see attached letter.

thanks,
Lu Terry
PO Box 381
Stevensville, MT. 59870