

InfrastructureUSA

Guest on THE INFRA BLOG

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Aviation's Essential Role

Many people don't realize that there are many different aspects to why general aviation is so important for our national economy, and for communities around the nation. First, the industry itself is responsible for about 1.2 million jobs, \$150 billion in economic impact; it's one of the only manufacturing industries that contributes positively to the balance of US trade, and it's an industry that, like many industries, took a real hit in the last couple years with the economic downturn. And so, for such a critical component of our economy, it's important that we do everything we can to support that growth. And that's such an important manufacturing base that supports jobs through out many different regions of our country.

Airports

With over 5,000 airports, and about 3,300 airports that are in the FAA's National Plan of Integrated Airports (NPIAS), local airports are critically important to our aviation infrastructure, and the majority of the traffic goes through a small percentage of those airports and is commercial traffic; and so that leaves a lot of communities that really rely exclusively on general aviation. And the problem is that many people have gotten on a commercial aircraft in their life, they understand it's important to go and visit relatives, or they go and fly for business, but general aviation carries out so many services, and resources that are not necessarily seen or understood by the general public. Whether it's flight training for our nation's next generation of future pilots; to supporting local business who use their own aircraft to travel around to reach far off destinations or customers or plants; or law enforcement; fire fighting; disaster relief; medical care; organ transport -- there's just so many services and resources that depend on general aviation. And for communities that don't have commercial service, it's such an important connector as well.

\$100 Fee

Included in the President's budget last year was a \$100 per-flight user fee that would apply to many users of general aviation aircraft. This is something that our members have been overwhelmingly opposed to, regardless of any exemptions that would be included in any proposal. Not because they are opposed to perhaps paying more funding if it's required to help with our nation's infrastructure, but because of the specific nature of a user fee; and the fact that it would impose just so much additional bureaucracy on our members. As I said, a

lot of our members are small businesses: they're farms, they're flight schools, they're organizations that do charitable flights. And to have to keep track of hundreds, upon hundreds, upon hundreds of fees – in many cases months after the fact – just becomes a bureaucratic nightmare. Particularly when we have an existing fuel tax mechanism that's efficient, it's easy to use, you pay at the pump; so we think that anything the administration, or Congress, needs to do in terms of additional revenue, no matter what, yes – it's an additional burden to put an additional tax on those businesses right now that are trying to recover, but in particular that bureaucracy would just be an administrative burden for our members. And from our standpoint at the Alliance, one of the additional things that we have had a concern with is why you would sort of create another mechanism altogether. You have an existing fuel tax in place. The FAA would have to then create some kind of tax-collection agency, or ability within the agency. And so why would you create more bureaucracy at a time where we're really supposed to be cutting government waste and reducing any of that kind of administrative overall spending and entity.

Citizen Outreach

The question about the role of citizens in this infrastructure debate, is a nice segue to what we're doing at the alliance: what is unique about our coalition is that we are really engaging both aviation stakeholders and non-aviation stakeholders alike, in order to try and raise awareness and increase public education about the value of aviation and general aviation in particular. And the reason for that, and what we kind of found is that often a lot of people in general aviation are sort of preaching to the choir, and that if you engage local mayors, and chambers of commerce, and governors, and local business, in sort of raising awareness about the value of aviation – and educating them and their fellow citizens as well – it's extremely effective. And that's why we've engaged in some of the activities that we have, such as encouraging our members to pass local proclamations and resolutions, and collecting signatures on petitions from mayors around the country to President Obama to raise awareness about the value of general aviation. So I think there's a very important role for citizens in raising awareness about the value of aviation, and general aviation, and I think that engaging people beyond the aviation community – for example in our case, is really so effective because it lends legitimacy to the message.

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