

State Airport System Plan Update

Public Meeting

Thursday, October 25th, 2018

Coventry Town Office

Introductions – Dan Delabruere, Michele Boomhower (VTrans)

Power Point Presentation – Dan Delabruere (VTrans)

Questions/Comments:

- When VTrans is looking at the economic development aspects of the airports, one of the items we are interested in for the NEKI airport is the interest in adding passenger service and our consultants have indicated that there is currently a lack of pilots. Are we working with career centers, VTC, FAA and others to determine how to address this issue and will it be included in the Plan? Dan explained that he has been consulting with the FAA regarding this matter – there used to be an FAA program, which no longer exists. There are EAA Chapters around the state which do a great job but are also underfunded. The Agency is developing a Grant Program to provide funding to support EAA activities which will engage youth. Tech Centers and EAA Chapters partnering could be a good direction, along with determining how to make better connections with the VTC program.
- Is there a coordinated effort to work with the GI Bill in the state which could assist in directing veterans to aviation? Jennifer Davis indicated that VTC has gone through that process for certain ratings to qualify. This also applies to their aircraft maintenance program.
- We have the students that want to learn but there is a shortage of Certified Flight Instructors (CFIs) to certify students. If there were a CFI at NEKI there would be a full class of students.
- Lyndonville has the same issues, there are kids that would like to learn how to fly but there aren't adequate resources (instructors).
- Could there be the possibility of sharing CFIs between airports?
- Jennifer Davis indicated that because the airlines are taking pilots with such low fly time, it may be a good idea to create CFIs out of an older generation of pilots who may be based here – perhaps through creating a flight instructor ground school training 1-2 students at a time.
- Is there an opportunity to have a conversation with the Agency of Education (Career Centers), the Department of Labor, the State College System?
- Some of the Tech Centers at the High Schools which have Automotive Programs have produced students which have taken an interest in Avionics, and there may be more ways to cross train, create job shadowing, mentoring, etc.
- There is a shortage of mechanics as well. Heritage Aviation has created its own apprenticeship training program which is working well. There are 70 employees at Heritage, 17 are licensed mechanics, we are moving folks from other parts of our business to the apprenticeship program.
- What is the salary for aviation mechanics? Tim McCole of Heritage indicated it is about \$58K per year plus benefits and employee ownership.

- Dan Gauvin indicated that there were 27 jets during the month of September, these are aircraft which have not been seen before, they are coming from all over, they are principally business people. We are working on getting customs on the field to increase cross border aircraft. It is about 60% business travel and 40% leisure. Many folks land at NEKI and then drive across the border because it is cheaper to use the airport resources in the States.
- Tim indicated that aircraft are coming to Vermont to meet a supplier, service aircraft, stay at a resort, and they are leaving money.
- Sherbrooke is 45 minutes away with 400,000 people which may not understand that there is an airport nearby that they can utilize. The marketing through ACCD will be important with access to the Canadian market. Dan indicated that he met with Customs and Border Protection last week, they are still not fully staffed in Derby Line but they hope to be soon. They did the test flight in the summer, they have committed to doing another, and the Port Director who is located here is local and is committed to working with his leadership.
- Currently folks are flying to Burlington to clear Customs and they are then flying to NEKI, which is expensive.
- There is a foreign trade zone housed at the airport which is a factor which should be a business allure. There is the potentiality to establish a bonded warehouse. Dan explained that he working with Chris Carrigan of the Vermont Chamber to determine if there are businesses which could locate at NEKI. Chris has given Dan a number of leads which we actively follow-up on.
- What have been hearing that Burlington and Franklin airports have a waiting list for hangars. Dan explained that we are hearing this around the State. The State does not have the funding to undertake the construction of hangars. Also the State permitting for stormwater has hampered efforts to advance hangars as we come into compliance with the newer stormwater permit systems. Michele explained that the VTrans worked to enable legislation this past year to bring Public-Private Partnership contracting activities to the our tool box, so we can potentially attract interested investors to do hangar development and other types of business development.
- What can communities do to support advancing economic development at the airports? Michele indicated that municipalities can certainly provide support through coordinating with their RPC/RDC to secure grants which could support business development at the airport, and assure that their municipal plans, bylaws and ordinances are consistent with these economic development goals.
- Tim McCole talked about the role of emergency medical services delivery in communities, in times of disaster – this needs to be captured in the plan. Dan indicated that airports are strategically placed around the state/country just for this purpose, and that having a 24-hour fuel service at NEKI has supported these services.
- We need to also consider folks who are building their own planes and their needs.
- What is the likelihood of the FAA supporting the construction of a terminal building? It is a shame to have a state-of-the-art airport with such an old terminal building. Dan explained that there are some airports who are qualified for special funding for terminal buildings, by that this does not currently rank high within the FAA prioritization system currently for general aviation airports.