
SEC-AAAE JOURNAL

Southeast Chapter of the American Association of Airport Executives

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Aviation Grinches Steal Christmas

It may have been the worst Christmas holiday for airline travel in the history of aviation.

An aborted U-turn by an American Airlines pilot sent a Dallas-bound MD-80 sliding into a muddy infield at Richmond International Airport the Wednesday before Christmas. The event created delays and cancellations for at least 100 other flights, closing the airport from about 8:20 am to a full opening around 7 pm. It was the first in a chain of events that ruined Christmas for thousands of travelers who never made it to their destinations, never received their baggage and delayed the delivery of gifts nationwide.

All so bad the Transportation Department Inspector General launched an investigation of the holiday hell encountered by thousands of USAirways and Comair passengers.

Shortly after Christmas, Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta ordered a review to determine the causes behind USAirways flight cancellations, delays and baggage handling malfunctions as well as the reasons behind Comair's computer system failure that resulted in the cancellation of 1,000 flights.

For USAirways, the nightmare began December 24 with severe weather in the Midwest causing ground stops and flight delays. Their major hub at Philadelphia was hard hit with more than

210,000 passengers on the books system-wide and 32,000 trying to get out of Philadelphia alone. Then came an unusual high number of sick calls from baggage handlers—about 3 times what the airline would have expected for the holiday.



Stuck in the mud at RIC

Stoppage of an 18-year old legacy crew-tracking system is the likely cause of the storm-connected disruption of holiday travel at the Delta Connection Comair. The storm dumped more than 2.5 feet of snow and ice in the Ohio Valley stranding passengers in the tens of thousands at airports from the Midwest to Canada.

The weather was only the precursor of a string of operational problems that resulted in a management decision on the evening of December 24 to shut down the entire operation of 1,160 flights on Christmas Day.

Prior to the shutdown, Comair's fleet of available Bombardier regional jets was reduced, compromising its ability to perform.

Snow, ice and sleet peppered the Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport, the Comair and Delta hub, on December 23-25. When temperatures dropped below 0° F, the tires of about 25 regional jets literally froze to the ground. Comair reduced its

schedule in this period, canceling flights that affected mainly 22 destinations.

But under the extreme weather conditions, deicing available aircraft took longer than usual and nearly exhausted the glycol supply at the airport. Then, on December 24, Comair's crew management and tracking system "became inoperable" according to the carrier. The system, manufactured by SBS International, a Boeing company now run by its Jeppesen subsidiary, keeps crew assignments in compliance with federal regulations and union contract provisions governing time and duty.

A backup system, requiring manual input, was not adequate to the task of reconfiguring the schedule, the airline says.

Register for the 2005 SEC-AAAE Annual Conference to Be held in Little Rock, Arkansas, on April 10-12, 2005. HURRY! April will be here before you know it!

Special points of interest:

- *Have you registered for the 2005 SEC-AAAE Annual Conference in Little Rock, Ark. slated for April 10-12, 2005? Need a registration form? Go to www.secaaae.org.*
- *Congratulations to Ken Spirito, A.A.E., who has been appointed as the Southeast Chapter's representative on the AAAE Board of Examiners. Ken replaces Wayne Shank, A.A.E., who has successfully served in that role for a number of years.*
- *Congratulations to SEC-AAAE Immediate Past President Parker McClellan, A.A.E., who has been appointed to the AAAE Nominations Committee. Parker Replaces Past President Patrick Graham who has served in that role for the past 5 years.*
- *Did you know the SEC-AAAE provides a scholarship to the SCC-AAAE Accreditation Academy? The next academy will be held March 13-19 in Arlington, TX. If your thesis has been approved by AAAE and you are a SEC-AAAE member in good standing, contact the executive secretary at secaaae@aol.com for details.*

John Hanlin Retires

Just over 30 years ago, former SEC-AAAE President John Hanlin and his family arrived in Blountville, Tennessee from Bluefield, West Virginia to accept a job as assistant manager of the “big” Tri-Cities Regional Airport. John had taken the Bluefield airport manager’s job fresh out of college even after the authority’s first choice backed out claiming he had received death threats from some “local yahoo.” In his year and a half there, John claims to have learned how to push snow, bush hog the grass, tow and fuel airplanes, deal with some quirky characters and figure out he didn’t want to learn it all the hard way.

John says when he moved to Tri-Cities, he liked his boss, the people he and his family met and the weather, but he reassured his wife they would be there for no more than 5 or 6 years.

Just like most of us, John adds that in many ways, his over 30-year career at Tri-Cities seems like only 5 or 6 years. But now, his children are grown and are (mostly) out of the house. He has watched a lot of folks come and go and he hopes the airport owner received more than its fair share from their association.

During his time in Tri-Cities, John created a financially successful transportation hub serving the needs of the traveling public and representing an important component of economic development for the region.

John Says, “I have been extremely fortunate over the last 30 years, thanks in large part to an understanding wife, good friends and wise mentors.”

We will miss you, John. Please don’t be a stranger to the SEC-AAAE. You played a major role in our success and we won’t forget you or your contributions.

Plans for Airport Authority Move Ahead

After years of discussing how to strengthen regional cooperation between Lynchburg and Campbell County, officials from both localities are moving forward with plans to create an independent authority to oversee the Lynchburg Regional Airport and a proposed commerce park on airport property.

During a recent joint meeting between the county’s Board of Supervisors and City Council, supervisors and council members gave their blessing for staff to pursue creation of the authority.

For at least a decade, the city and county have

discussed forming an authority and teaming up to build a commerce park on more than 250 available acres near the airport.

The city currently runs the airport, which is located in the county, and the county receives more than \$200,000 a year in taxes from the airport’s operations.

Plans for the commerce park were put on hold when the Region 2000 Regional Commission decided to pursue building a regional commerce park a few years ago. But when that idea fell through, the county and the city decided to return to their original idea.

Airport and government officials said they believe an independent authority made up of members appointed by the city and county would manage the airport and commerce park more efficiently and save the airport and the city money.

Lynchburg Airport Manager Mark Courtney said another benefit of having the airport under an authority is that it would eliminate some of the bureaucracy involved in government business. Plus, the airport would not have to compete with other city departments for money and other resources.

Airport Authority Idea Gets Tepid Reception

On the eastern shore of Tampa Bay is an airport jammed to the rafters, where parking is difficult nearly all the time and impossible during peak travel periods. Every month it sets new passenger records.

On the western shore of the bay is an airport looking toward spring expecting to be barer than Mother Hubbard’s cupboard.

It’s enough to get some people talking about a share-the-wealth scheme. Take a little of what Tampa International Airport has in abundance and give it to St. Petersburg-Clearwater Inter-

national Airport, which is hemorrhaging air service.

It would save the mid-Pinellas airport and give TIA some breathing room so a decision to build a second terminal complex might be postponed for several years. In theory, the process would be supervised by a new Pinellas County Aviation Authority, similar to Hillsborough’s. It could be followed by a regional authority with an even broader view.

The notion was recently proposed by State Senator Jim Sebesta, R-St. Petersburg, chair-

man of the Senate Transportation Committee, after one of the two largest carriers at St. Petersburg left and the other announced its intention to go, eliminating 75 percent of the airport’s business.

While officials on both sides of the bay say any notion for St. Petersburg is worth discussion, enthusiasm at this point runs from lukewarm to nonexistent.

Sebesta says he has no plan to file legislation to create the authority, but will help if that is what commissioners want to do.

Airport Authority Executive Director Steps Aside

The Collier County Airport Authority welcomed its new Executive Director, Theresa Cook, at the December 15 meeting at the Marco Island Airport.

Cook, formerly the airport manager for Las Cruces International Airport in Las Cruces, New Mexico, will replace Eugene Schmidt, a board member who stepped in to hold the position on a temporary basis.

As executive director, Cook will be responsible administering and guiding the development and management of the three publicly owned general aviation airports that serve

Collier County. Those airports include Immokalee Regional Airport, Marco Island Executive Airport and Everglades Airpark.

During her interview, Cook, 44, expressed a desire to return to Southwest Florida and was interested in a position that offered three such diverse airports with tremendous potential. Before Cook became airport manager in Las Cruces in 2003, she was the airport development coordinator at Austin-Bergstrom International Airport in Texas and executive director of Marathon Airport in the Keys from 1999 to 2003.

As Schmidt stepped aside, he presented the

authority with an assortment of pastries because his wife advised him to “Step down on a



sweet note.” And so he did.

The Little Airport That Could

The Middle Georgia Regional Airport has undergone a facelift, but for all of the renovation work, actual passenger service is moving back in time. Though the airport wants to become a major regional air hub, recent events have stopped it in its tracks and forced a retreat.

Atlantic Southeast Airlines was providing five daily round-trip flights, but because of security concerns those flights had to be cut back and now there are only two departing flights and two returning flights. This further punches a hole in airport proponents’ dreams of attracting a second airline—which was supposed to

be secured with service beginning March 1. With the airport unprepared to handle one airline, there is little doubt regarding its handling two.

It is estimated that to fix the basic security problems would cost \$100,000. That seems a paltry sum to hang up the desires of an airport that has recently undergone a \$6 million renovation project, but its \$100,000 the city does not have. It appears someone failed, in the early stages of design, to read and understand the Transportation Security Administration’s rules and regulations. It would be difficult to believe that money could not have been

gleaned from the renovation costs to produce the additional security necessary for expanded service.

Until the city learns whether a new grant will cover the cost of the overruns, officials are turning over every rock in their search for funds, public or private.

The cutback by ASA puts Middle Georgia travelers at a distance disadvantage. Scheduling connecting flights will be more difficult, and some travelers will undoubtedly decide to fight Atlanta traffic rather than use the Macon Airport.

Airport Wraps Up Work on 1st Phase Terminal Renovations

The tattered orange carpet is gone and the dimly lighted corners have been brightened.

Officials at Louisville International Airport recently announced that the first phase of its \$41 million terminal renovation is nearly complete, and work will now begin on the second phase, renovating restrooms and moving baggage-scanning machines behind airline ticket counters—and out of public view.

“We’ve finished this project ahead of schedule,” executive director Skip Miller said dur-

ing the airport’s annual year-end news conference.

The project, which was to be completed in 2005, included installation of six regional jet gates which spare passengers from having to walk outside to board planes, new smoking areas, and plasma screen televisions that show arriving and departing flights.

Throughout the airport, walls have been painted and columns have been refurbished, now sporting a brushed aluminum finish. The

updates give the airport a sleek and modern but warm feel. And there is new carpeting and brighter lighting.

The next phase is expected to be completed in 2006.

Another improvement in January—only two taxi companies will be allowed to take passengers from the airport. Miller predicted the public would be pleased with this change because of the services the companies provide.

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The Work Hard—Play Hard Chapter of The American Association of Airport Executives!

**We're on the web
at
www.secaaae.org**

In Memory

It is with great regret we inform you that John Dee Mason, former airport manager for the Huntsville-Madison County Airport Authority, passed away on September 23, 2004.

Help Wanted

HMB Professional Engineers, a leading Central Kentucky engineering firm, is seeking a Design Engineer/Project Manager for their Airport Design Department in Kentucky and Nashville, Tennessee. The candidate must have a bachelors degree in engineering and hold either an EIT or PE License, excellent written and verbal communications skills and experience using AutoCad or Microstation. Three to four years of experience is preferred. Send resume and cover letter to: Human Resources Department; 3 HMB Circle; Frankfort, KY 40601. EOE.

Florida Feels Good About the Future of Aviation

A Florida transportation official recently told Tallahassee Regional Airport officials that despite lower ticket prices and airline financial woes, commercial and general aviation activity in Florida will grow 50 percent in the next 20 years.

Bill Ashbaker, state aviation manager for the Florida Department of Transportation, said population increases will place bigger demands on private and public airports already strapped for money and with few resources to produce more income. He said the state will supply about \$1 billion to airports across Florida over the next

five years with money collected from aviation and motor fuel taxes.

Ashbaker noted a number of airports in South Florida and along the Atlantic Coast are already operating in excess capacity or will be in the next 20 years.

But Tallahassee Regional Airport is nowhere near capacity now, according to Phil Inglese, the airport's assistant director. Inglese said the airport will not be at capacity 20 years from now even if growth rates match projections.

Inglese pointed to plans to spend

about \$46 million over the next four or five years to improve airport facilities. Among the projects planned or already complete are terminal renovations, repairs and upgrades to taxiways and both major runways, revamping the operations center and completing the acquisition of land to expand the buffer zone near the airport.

The projects will be paid from The Federal Aviation Administration's AIP, Florida DOT and from airport revenues.