

THE WARSAW MUNICIPAL AIRPORT EXPANSION:

How the community will benefit

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Historically, access to transportation facilities have enabled cities and towns to become more economically productive and vital. For example, we can witness the success of cities such as New York and San Francisco due in large part to easy access to the ocean in pursuit of international trade. Later, when the railroad system began to play a major part in America's transportation system, large inland cities developed. And more recently, with the development of the interstate highway system and air transportation, almost every area of our nation has access or can obtain access to markets throughout the United States and overseas. The point to be made is that economic vitality and the ability to move people, goods and services in the most efficient manner available are tied hand in hand.

The subject of transportation needs for a vibrant economy is not necessarily limited to large metropolitan areas, but it is also of major importance to Warsaw, Indiana. Located in our community, we have firms which reach out to markets not only in the Midwest, but also throughout the United States, and some who market internationally. Air travel has become indispensable in addressing the need for traveling these distances at the speed with which modern business decisions are often made. Our paper addresses Kosciusko County's need for expanded airport facilities and how we as a community will benefit.

In early Kosciusko County, the economic base was primarily agricultural. Later, tourism and industry grew which results today in a well diversified local economy. In fact, 1981 agricultural income in the county led all counties in Indiana.¹ Also industrial employment numbers 44.9% of the

workforce which is approximately 20% higher than the national or state averages.² Due to these factors and the fact that no one type of industry is dominant, we feel that Kosciusko County is able to weather economic downturns much better than neighboring counties, such as in the case in the current economic depression. However, attracting and retaining small business and industry is probably the major key in maintaining this diversification. A good, usable airport has played a major role in attracting industry to Warsaw in the past. However, a look at our present airport situation may give us a basis on how we need to plan for the future.

Presently the Warsaw Municipal Airport is classified as a General Utility airport. The present North-South runway is rated at a maximum load capacity of 15,000 pounds. As of 1977 there were 57 aircraft based in Warsaw, the largest a Beechcraft King Air 200 (12,500 pounds). The largest user however, is a Gulfstream I (33,600 pounds) which is well over the runway rating.³

With the present airport facility utilized to its maximum load capacity in the mid-70's, the Warsaw Aviation Board began looking to the future of air transportation in Warsaw. They hired A and E Engineering to develop a master plan from studies made. In their proposal, the airport would be upgraded to a Basic Transport Facility. This project includes lengthening the current North-South runway to 4975 feet and constructing a new East-West runway of 5000 feet. Simply stated, an East-West runway is needed to increase the safety since winds are not always desirable for North-South operations. Also the runways would be substantially widened to provide an increased safety factor. This construction would enable the

Warsaw Municipal Airport to safely handle Turbine, Turbo-Jet and Turbo-Fan jets of up to 60,000 pounds gross weight. Examples of these would be Lear-Jet, Sabreliner, Fan-Jet Falcon, DeHavilland 125, Jet Star and Grumman Gulfstream II.⁴

As is the case with many community projects, a cost/benefit analysis can be very revealing. First the costs: In 1977 estimates of local cost was \$160,000 of the total \$2,800,000 bill. Presently, with the court decision on land values, the maximum local cost is estimated at \$280,000 of the total \$4,000,000. This is estimated to increase property tax rates in the city of Warsaw by 12½ cents per \$100 assessed valuation.⁵ The difference between the total cost and local cost will be absorbed by the previously approved Federal and State monies which will pick up 90 - 95 percent of the total cost.

However, the community benefits need to be considered. First of all, there is an immediate need from existing businesses to improve their transportation capabilities. Zimmer's chief pilot, whose firm is the largest user of the airport, stated: "We are actively engaged in the research of a new jet aircraft and are greatly limited in our selection because of the airport size."⁶ As the master plan was developed, many industries expressed their needs for larger facilities.

Another benefit is the timing of the project. With the money crunch in government, we need to take advantage of pre-approved dollars or risk losing this potential community improvement. "The time appears to be excellent for an investment into the future of the Warsaw Airport. The Federal and State Agencies are prepared to grant necessary funds needed for the expansion program and we encourage the City of Warsaw and the Board of Aviation to pursue this opportunity."⁷

A third benefit would be the reduced dependence on larger metropolitan airports, such as Fort Wayne, for transportation services. One company, United Telephone, indicated that they would not operate their jet fleet from Warsaw because the airport could not adequately handle their craft, but that they presently land in Fort Wayne and complete the trip in a smaller craft.⁸

A fourth benefit is the improved safety factor. As was mentioned earlier, the East-West runway addition and the widened runways will greatly increase the safety of landing. The East-West runways will also remove much air traffic away from the population center south of the airport, thereby reducing noise levels in Warsaw and an increased safety factor.

A final benefit and in our minds the most significant is the effect on the economic vitality of the community. "If the city wishes to continue its growth pattern, it must not allow its transportation facilities to become a limiting factor."⁹ In the master plan, six companies indicated a definite need for runway lengths large enough for corporate jets. And several other companies, including Maple Leaf Farms of Milford who anticipates doubling the size of their operations in the next few years, indicated the airport and its proposed expansion were major factors in deciding to relocate here or expand facilities here.¹⁰ Can we as a community afford to ignore these providers of local jobs? According to Chamber of Commerce statistics, 100 jobs in manufacturing equals disposable income of \$1,284,000 and retail sales in a community of \$867,000. Obviously then, the loss of only one or two small manufacturers can have a dramatic effect on the local economy, much greater than the costs involved. Not only would we give existing employers an additional incentive to stay in Warsaw or to expand here, we also are making Warsaw more attractive to new business by expanding our airport.

Local comments are heard that the airport expansion will only benefit a few elite corporations. In answer to this, it is true that local corporations are the prime users of the airport, however, the group is not an elite few, but a large cross-section of manufacturing and business interests use the airport regularly. And even those who do not regularly use the airport will be affected. By enabling local business to compete more effectively in the marketplace can stimulate increased sales, profits, more jobs and expansion of facilities. This translates into an increased property tax base, increased retail sales base, lower unemployment and overall improvement in the quality of life in Kosciusko County. As we take a look at the bottom line on airport expansion - will the benefits outweigh the costs? We believe the answer is an emphatic Yes!

Footnotes

1. Warsaw Times-Union, March 1982
2. Master Plan, A & E Engineering
3. Ibid
4. Ibid
5. David Whitesell, former attorney for Aviation Board, April 28, 1982
Chamber of Commerce, Transportation Committee Meeting, April 29, 1982
6. Master Plan, A & E Engineering
7. J. A. Morgan, president of Zimmer, in letter to Aviation Board,
Master Plan Report
8. Master Plan, A & E Engineering
9. J. A. Morgan, president of Zimmer, in letter to Aviation Board,
Master Plan Report
10. Terry Tucker, president of Maple Leaf Farms, in a statement to Chamber
of Commerce Transportation Committee Meeting, April 29, 1982
Master Plan, A & E Engineering

Bibliography/Sources

1. A & E Engineering, Master Plan - Warsaw Municipal Airport, March 1979
2. Warsaw Times-Union, 1977 through current, numerous articles
3. Community Survey - compiled by United Telephone Company, 1980
4. Warsaw Chamber of Commerce, Transportation Committee Meeting, April 29, 1982
5. David Whitesell, past attorney for Aviation Board, interview April 28, 1982
6. Mike Hodges, mayor of Warsaw, interview, April 1982
7. Jerry Kay, Aviation Board member.