



Exploring new solutions
for a safer, cleaner, quieter,
and better Aspen Airport.



Photo by Pete McBride

Every day hundreds of planes take off or land at the Aspen Airport, 99% in opposite directions. ASE is known as one of the most challenging airports in the country.

Collision warning: Crucial aviation forecast fudges facts, ignores Aspen conditions, overrides local choices

A half-million Aspen airline passengers in 2050—two-thirds more than now—brought by a fleet far more polluting and barely quieter. Is that what you want?

That's the future the Airport Advisory Board will consider tomorrow when it votes on the new Airport Forecast. If the AAB and the Board of County of Commissioners approve it, we're on our way to bigger, heavier, fossil-fueled airplanes. The Forecast is mainly about airline planes—one-sixth of the operations—but five-sixths are private planes.

Wait—didn't our County Commissioners, building on the ASE Vision process, set conditions to prevent that? Yes: they required commercial planes to be at least 30% quieter, less climate-harming, and less air-polluting, all by 2030; passenger growth managed to about 0.8% a year; and airline planes not over 100–120 seats and 140,000 pounds. But the Federal Aviation Administration just vetoed all six goals.

The FAA-dictated Forecast blocks local goals

The FAA doesn't allow local aviation growth management. It insists on new regional jets that are dirtier, noisier, and less summer-capable than the current fleet, then 130–150-seat planes about twice as big (and twice the Valley's maximum emergency medical capacity)—with no evidence that any of these new planes are better or cheaper than today's rugged fleet.

In 20 years, the new airline fleet would emit 17% less CO₂, but 40% more throat-burning nitrogen oxides. And the new \$200-million airside required for the bigger airline planes would also have to admit any private planes that fit, even if they're noisier and dirtier, like old 737s and A319s. The Forecast ignores those added impacts.

If we want more FAA discretionary grants, that's their price. What's ours?

For what price would we give up a half-century of growth management striving to keep Aspen Aspen? Where would 91,673 extra visitors in 2042 sleep? The Forecast assumes no lodging constraints. That's one of many serious analytic flaws and gaps that make it unsound and unreliable. Today, Aspen Fly Right publishes a thorough assessment of the Forecast (QR link below, Essay #15) to aid the AAB's evaluation. It's disturbing reading. If the FAA read it, the agency's goals might become reconcilable with the community's, avoiding a collision—if we could have a different and more creative conversation.

Central planning or home rule?

The FAA is holding hostage the urgently needed new passenger terminal by demanding a new airside first for bigger planes. But lost grants could be offset in just a few years by \$15–20+ million of *new* net annual income that the County could gain by choosing, in the coming weeks, to keep control of private planes' Fixed Base Operation. Reinvesting FBO revenues in the Airport rather than enriching the world's largest private-equity firm could let Aspen, not the FAA, choose the airport we want.

Running the FBO in the public interest—most simply using an experienced contractor—could also make fuel prices fair and reasonable, ensure quality and transparency, and equitably serve local pilots. There's every reason to do this and no good reason not to. Commissioners need to hear your voice.

Aspen Airport's future is being chosen now

The Airport Advisory Board meets from 3:00 to 5:00 tomorrow, Thursday 18 May, at the Airport Operations Center, 1001 Owl Creek Road. They'll take 3-minute public comments at the start (before they vote) and again at the end. Your letters to the Board of County Commissioners, copied to the newspapers, could also inform these critical decisions that will shape our community for generations.

What You Can Do

Please tell the Pitkin County Board of County Commissioners what you think. Our County Commissioners are:
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