

Hi, Don Ehnebuske for Community Comment

Humboldt County is a unique place with businesses and organizations that offer a lot of products, talent, and creativity to the rest of the world - but our community can only thrive if we have good connections to the world.

A coalition of businesses, institutions, individuals and local governments, including the Redwood Region Economic Development Commission that I represent, has been working together to attract more air service to the area because they understand the need for good connectivity with the world. Not only have they been working together, but along with the Headwaters Fund, they've put money behind their efforts.

The goal is simple - get more flights to more destinations.

What's the emphasis on destinations about? It's all about reliability. If you show up at the airport you have to have confidence that you will arrive at your destination with minimal delays. And if you're a local institution like the Blood Bank, or one of the great fresh Humboldt Made food products, you need to know that you can get your freight to where it needs to go in a timely manner. Right now, that's not always the case.

Let me give you a little background with a story about our airport, now known as the California Redwood Coast Airport, that needs updating. The story is based in real history and tells about a hurdle our airport had in the past, but the story has persisted even today when it's no longer a problem. It's the story of Humboldt County having the foggiest airport in the country and it started in WWII.

~~THAT LEADS TO CONCERNS ABOUT FOG - APPROX 3000 ft in the past~~
During the war, there was a need to train military pilots and airport operators in landing in the fog conditions that were being encountered in northern Europe. The military found a great flat location that had plenty of fog, so they put in a landing strip and began experimenting with ways to disperse the fog enough to allow pilots to land safely. That's right, the location was McKinleyville, the current location of our airport.

The fog hasn't gone away, though we may no longer be the foggiest airport in the country. But a lot of other things have changed. We're no longer filling trenches alongside the runway with kerosene to disperse the fog like they did back in the

1940's. Our modern guidance systems are now good enough to allow planes to land in conditions with as little as 200 feet of visibility.

So if we have overcome the fog issues through excellent technology and if cancellations due to problems at our airport are now much rarer events, why is service not as reliable as it should be?

This is where we come back to the need for a new destination. Nearly all of our flights go to the San Francisco airport, SFO, and SFO is hemmed in by urban development on all sides and doesn't have room to expand. They have two parallel runways that are both in use most of the time, keeping a steady flow of planes in and out. However, during bad weather, those runways are too close together to use both safely at the same time. This situation results in delayed and cancelled flights. When they are choosing which flights to cancel or delay, it's hard for them to choose a flight that's already in the air, so they look to cancel flights that are close to SFO and still on the ground. Yep, you got it – that's us. And that's the reason why our creative businesses, institutions, tourism industry and others need flights to another hub as soon as possible. And we need a major hub with good connections to the rest of the world to support the world class businesses and tourism destinations that we have here.

Other regional airports like ours all across the country are facing declining service as airlines merge and concentrate their service in the largest hubs. But I do have some good news - I'm happy report that we're in the midst of serious talks with an airline to provide service to another major hub. I can't say more at this time and of course there are no guarantees in this very rapidly changing airline industry but right now we are very hopeful.

And when that service arrives, it will be important for us to fill those planes so we can keep that service here.

But in the meantime, we are continuing to do everything possible to bring in more flights to more destinations to increase reliability as quickly as possible. Our community deserves it.

This has been Don Ehnebuske for Community Comment