

The Manager's Approach



Vol. 6 Issue 2

Columbia & Pine Mountain Lake Airports

February, 2007

Airport Capital Improvements

Every year the FAA requires airport operators to submit a projection of those projects that may request funding through the FAA's Airport Improvement Grant Program. Currently, the FAA will fund 95% of approved projects. Caltrans requires the same project list but requests the list be submitted to them every two years. Matching project grants from Caltrans have been reduced from 5% to 2.5% for this next year. The following lists show the projects that we are submitting to the FAA for our airport improvements.

Columbia Airport:

- Construct Taxiway C Extension
- Upgrade the AWOS
- Construct Fire Protection Waterlines
- Construct Perimeter Access Road Around Runway 35
- Rehabilitate Runway Lighting & Upgrade the VASI to PAPI
- Rehabilitate the Taxi-lanes
- Update the Airport Master Plan
- Construct a Runway 17-35 Exit at the Windsock to the Campground

Pine Mountain Lake Airport:

- Install an AWOS
- Design & Construct Drainage Plan
- Construct Vehicle Access Roads Around Each End of the Runway
- Upgrade the VASI to PAPI
- Rehabilitate the Parking Apron
- Rehabilitate the Runway Lighting
- Acquire Available Land in the Runway Protection Zones

The only available funding for large projects is through the FAA's Airport Improvement

Program. Our projects are funded with what are termed "entitlement funds" and "discretionary funds". We are eligible for \$150k in entitlement funds each year and can bank up to three years worth of these funds. Normally, this money has to be used first before we are eligible for any discretionary funds. While our entitlement funds are dedicated to our specific airports, the discretionary funds are distributed to the airports with the highest need. Thus, our larger projects have to compete for funding with projects at other airports. Safety is one of the primary factors in the FAA's selection of a project for discretionary funding. Reducing runway incursions by the construction of perimeter access roads, improving the approach lighting systems, and rehabilitating the runway lighting systems should qualify for discretionary funds. Other projects will have to come from our entitlement funds.

Air Med Acquires New Ride

The familiar red and white MBB helicopter that Air Med has been flying since they started operating out of Columbia Airport has been replaced with a yellow and black Eurocopter AStar AS350 B3. The new aircraft has a single engine (the Bolkow is a twin engine) which reduces the operating and maintenance costs. The AStar also has much better high altitude capabilities than the Bolkow. With this new capability Air Med will be evaluating additional landing zones at higher elevations in the mountains which will allow quicker access to those needing medical assistance.

Taking a quick look at the AStar's numbers I found that it has 840 horsepower, a max take-off weight of 4,960 pounds and a

service ceiling of 20,000 feet. Although none of us want to “need” a ride in the new AStar, it is nice to know that it is available to those requiring medical assistance, especially if you are up in the mountains.



Air Med's New AStar AS350 B3

Remodeling Airport Restrooms

A remodel of our restrooms at Columbia Airport is long overdue. I doubt that anyone really knows if they have ever been upgraded since they were built. We began the remodel of the restrooms in the end of Hangar Row A late last year and have begun the work on the restrooms in the Bald Eagle Aviation Lounge. The facelift will include painting the walls, installing new flooring, some new lighting, a new window, the removal of a shower stall and other upgrades. This work is being done on top of our normal maintenance responsibilities so it will take a few months to accomplish. If all goes as planned the remodel should be complete by the end of March, if not sooner.

Stupid Pilot Tricks

False ELT Signals

A couple of weeks ago we had an ELT go off at Columbia Airport. For those readers that are not pilots, an ELT is an Emergency Locator Transmitter which is radio that sends out a distress signal that can be detected by search and rescue aircraft (like the Civil Air Patrol), and satellites (SARSATs). Whenever an ELT is detected, my office usually receives a call from the Search and Rescue Coordination Center letting me know that an ELT has been

detected at or near my airport. When notified that there is an ELT signal, we go looking for the source, which fortunately, is almost always an ELT that has been inadvertently activated. In order to find the ELT signal we start passing the word around the airport for everyone to check their aircraft and to help look for the signal. This can involved a dozen people or more.

I've heard that over 90% of all ELT signals are false alarms involving an aircraft that is in for maintenance, just experienced a hard landing, or where the ELT just got accidentally activated. At Columbia Airport we usually have one or two ELTs go off every year and they have all been associated with maintenance activities, either by a mechanic or by a pilot/owner. This preventable situation ends up interrupting many peoples work and necessitates phone calls to the FAA.

All pilots and mechanics can do their part by making sure an ELT has been disarmed every time it is removed from an aircraft. If an ELT has been reinstalled or tested, make sure it has been reset then put back in the arm mode.

I know the aviation community takes every ELT signal very seriously. We treat them as a notification of an emergency. Pilots and mechanics should be serious about how they handle and maintain ELT transmitters. Learn how to properly operate them, how to make sure they are turned off and then verify they are off by monitoring the emergency frequency.

The Manager's Approach is a monthly publication from the Tuolumne County Airports Director for the purpose of keeping our community informed of local aviation and airport issues. You can contact me at:

Tuolumne County Airports Department
Jim Thomas, Airports Director
10723 Airport Road, Columbia, CA 95310
209-533-5685

jthomas@co.tuolumne.ca.us
www.tuolumnecounty.ca.gov