

PDK Watch Newsletter, March, 1999

Airport Expansion in Violation of County Policy

In an appalling abuse of power CEO Liane Levetan's administration has violated a county policy regarding the weight limit on aircraft. For the past twelve years it was the understanding of the community that there was a 66,000-pound maximum weight for aircraft operating out of DeKalb-Peachtree Airport*. Yet Airport Director Lee Rimmel has expanded airport operations by allowing aircraft, which are FAA-certified to carry up to 105,000 pounds, to operate at the airport and dismisses written policy statements as only guidelines. (Try telling the IRS that you thought the tax tables were only guidelines!)

Numerous airport, county, and federal documents state that aircraft using PDK Airport shall not exceed 66,000 pounds in weight. The 11th Circuit Court of Appeals, a federal district court, upheld the 66,000-pound weight limit in their decision of C.A.R.E. Now, Inc. vs. FAA in 1988**. In their decision, which upheld the runway extension without an environmental impact study, the court decreed, "The proposal explicitly maintains the current loading requirement of 66,000 pounds dual wheel. The purpose of the extension is to provide an increased margin of safety . . .," and "Furthermore, the proposal expressly maintains the current weight limitation of 66,000 pounds. The proposed runway extension is not designed to accommodate operations by aircraft larger than the ones currently using PDK."

In 1987 in its acceptance of the Environmental Assessment for the runway extension, the FAA stated, "The runway extension is neither designed nor intended to accommodate operations by aircraft larger than the ones presently using the airport. The extension would enhance the safety and efficiency of operations by these aircraft. The runway would not be strengthened and aircraft would not be allowed to depart with a gross takeoff weight above the current limitation of 66,000 pounds." The Part 150 Noise Study update in 1998 states, "Aircraft weighing more than 66,000 pounds are prohibited from normal operation at PDK." The Pilot Information section of the PDK Airport website in 1999 states that the weight bearing capacity of its longest runway is 66,000 pounds.

As Chief Executive Officer it is CEO Levetan's responsibility to administer county policy.

Ms. Levetan, Who authorized this breach of policy?

*Just in the past few weeks it was discovered that county code sets a limit of 75,000 pounds for routine operations.

**Citizens Against Runway Extension Now (CARE NOW) lost in their suit against the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to have an environmental study conducted prior to the extension of the runway.

Airport Director Increases Weight Limit in FAA Documents

In a January 27, 1999, letter to the FAA, Airport Director Lee Remmel cited the 66,000 dual wheel maximum weight limitation as incorrect. He requested that the FAA change two publications to show 105,000 pounds dual wheel weight rather than 66,000. PDK Watch is astounded to learn that Mr. Remmel has initiated a written change in county policy and that he routinely allows aircraft certified to carry weight above the stated limit to operate out of PDK Airport. This should not happen without the appropriate environmental study followed by the appropriate procedure for changing policy. Is this a maneuver to usurp the policy making power of our Board of Commissioners?

Airport Expansion on Two Fronts

Whether the boundary fence is moved to include additional property or the capacity of airport operations is increased, the result is the same - an expanded airport, more noise, and decreased property values. So while our county officials have been declaring that PDK Airport would not be expanding, it has been expanded by allowing larger capacity aircraft to use the facility. In addition we have the threat of the buyout being used to push the fence out.

CEO Liane Levetan plans to have a land use consultant (without community input) to determine the highest and best use of land currently being purchased through a noise abatement program. CEO Levetan directed Airport Director Lee Remmel, who had earlier expressed his desire to install hangars on this property, to write the request for proposal for the land use study. (Does a fox and hen house come to mind?)

It would be outrageous for any of this land being bought for noise abatement to be used to increase airport activities, but so far the community is left out of a process affecting our quality of life.

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