

SOME ISSUES OF THE AIRPORT MANAGEMENT

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Internationally, the recommended standards for the operation and management of civil-use airports are provided by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). In most individual countries, airports are managed directly by the government, most often under the ministry of transport. In some countries, including EU countries, some airports are privately owned and operated, although, despite private ownership, they are still subject to much of the country's regulations regarding aviation operations. The complex system of civil airports is made up of individual airport facilities of varying sizes, serving various purposes, all organized into plans of regional, national, and international levels. The range of rules, regulations, and policies, administered from varying levels of government, cover the full spectrum of airport and aviation system operations. Furthermore, a large number of professional and industry organizations play a large part in influencing the policies by which airport management must operate their facilities. By understanding where an airport manager's airport falls within the civil aviation system, what rules must be followed, and what sources of support and assistance exist, the task of efficiently managing the complex system that is an airport, becomes highly facilitated.

Key words: airport management, airport authority, state-operated airport, public relations, local community

It is well understood that a viable and efficient transportation system is a fundamental and necessary component to the economy of any region. Transportation, by definition, provides the ability for people and goods to move between communities. This movement leads to trade and commerce between markets, which, in turn, lead to jobs, earnings, and overall economic benefit for a community's residents.

Even though there are a variety of transportation modes, such as automobiles, trucks, ships, and railroads, perhaps no other mode has as significant an impact on intercity trade and commerce as aviation. Travel in the aviation system allows for intercontinental travel of large volumes of passengers and cargo in relatively short periods of time. Access to markets around the world has resulted in the largest of communities reaping extraordinary economic benefit.

Airports are the gateways to the nation's aviation system, providing access to air transportation for the surrounding community. Commercial air carriers provide access to air transportation between many major metropolitan areas of the country. Thousands of smaller cities, towns, and villages have access to aviation by way of airports serving general aviation.

The airport has become vital to the growth of business and industry in a community by providing air access for companies that must meet the demands of supply, competition, and expanding marketing areas. Communities without airports or sufficient air service have limitations placed on their capacity for economic growth.

Airports and related aviation and non-aviation businesses located at the airport represent a major source of employment for many communities around the country. The wages and salaries paid by airport-related businesses can have a significant direct effect on the local economy by providing the means to purchase goods and services while generating tax revenues as well. Local payrolls are not the only measure of an airport's economic benefit to the community. In addition, employee expenditures generate successive waves of additional employment and purchases that are more difficult to measure but nevertheless substantial.

It is often said that managing an airport is like being mayor of a city. Similar to a city, an airport is comprised of a huge variety of facilities, systems, users, workers, rules, and regulations. Also, just as cities thrive on trade and commerce with other cities, airports are successful in part by their ability to successfully be the location where passengers and cargo travel to and from other

airports. Furthermore, just as cities find their place as part of its county's, state, and country's economy, airports too, must operate successfully as part of the nation's system of airports.

Whether privately owned or part of a public system, there are fundamental characteristics of the administrative and organizational structure of an airport. Privatization refers to shifting governmental functions and responsibilities, in whole or in part, to the private sector. The most extensive privatizations involve the sale or lease of public assets. Airport privatization, in particular, typically involves the lease of airport property and/or facilities to a private company to build, operate, and/or manage commercial services offered at the airport.

The number of people employed at a given airport can range from as few as one, at the smallest of general aviation facilities, to as many as 50,000 at the world's largest airport authorities. Those airports that employ fewer numbers of people expect these people to accept a wider range of responsibilities. For example, an airport management employee at a small airport might be responsible for maintaining the airfield, managing finances, and maintaining good relations with the local public. At the larger airports, employees are typically given very specific responsibilities for a particular segment of airport management.

Airport management as a career

There are many career paths within the field of airport management as evidenced by the wide variety of job descriptions under the previous section. Even the job of airport manager varies greatly. At one extreme is the manager of a large metropolitan airport, an appointee or civil service employee of the city government or airport authority, who heads a large staff of assistants and specialists through which he or she manages a highly complex organization. At the other extreme is the owner-manager of a small private field near a rural community. The latter might combine activities as airport manager with work in some other business. Between these two extremes is the manager of a municipally owned or privately owned airport where there are a limited number of scheduled airline flights each day. Based at the airport are several fixed-base operators (FBOs) and a number of aircraft owned by individuals and corporations. The typical manager of a medium-size airport deals with all segments of the aviation community including the airlines, general aviation, and state agencies. In the early days of aviation, an individual could become an airport manager if he or she was a pilot and had several years of experience in some segment of the industry. Although the individual had to be able to manage the operation for the owner, his or her experience was likely to be in some area of flying rather than in business management. Today an airport manager must be primarily a skilled and experienced executive with a broad background in all facets of aviation and management in general. It is no longer necessary that the manager be a pilot.

It is also acknowledged that almost every airport manager's job situation is unique in some major respects because of the wide variety of size of airport and type of ownership and operation. There are also wide variations in government procedures in different communities. This sometimes causes the responsibilities, salaries, and authority of airport managers to be completely different from one city to the next. Even the job title varies. Director of aviation, airport superintendent, executive director, airport director, general manager, and other titles are often used instead of airport manager.

The airport manager⁷⁸ is often part landlord and part business executive. As a landlord, the safe condition and operation of the airport is the manager's greatest responsibility. The maintenance

⁷⁸ **Airport director.** The airport director is responsible for the overall day-to-day operation of the airport. He or she reports directly to the airport authority, the airport board, or governmental commission charged with the development and administration of the airport. This individual directs, coordinates, and reviews through subordinate supervisors, all aircraft operations, building and field maintenance, construction plans, community relations, and financial and personnel matters at the airport. The airport director also:

- Supervises and coordinates with airline, general aviation, and military tenants use of airport facilities.
- Reviews airport tenant activities for compliance with terms of leases and other agreements.
- Supervises enforcement of aircraft air and ground traffic and other applicable regulations.

of the airport buildings and land is also important. As a business executive, the manager is in charge of public relations; financial planning; profitable and efficient day-to-day operation; and coordination of airline, concession, and airport facilities to best serve the tenants and flying public. The airport manager's primary duty is the safe and efficient operation of the airport and all its facilities regardless of its size. However, at least in the larger commercial airports, the manager does not have direct control over most flying activities. He or she must deal with all groups and individuals who use the airport facilities. These include representatives of the airlines that schedule flights, maintain and service their aircraft, and process passengers; all segments of the general aviation community and individual and corporate owners and operators of aircraft; and the government-employed staffs of the air traffic control facilities, customs, and so forth. All of these groups can be regarded as tenants of the airport, carrying on their independent activities. Besides dealing with the companies and individuals directly concerned with flying, the manager is in contact with concessionaires who operate restaurants, shops, and parking facilities, and with the traveling public.

The size of the airport and the services it offers its tenants and the public play an important part in determining the airport manager's specific duties. Some of these duties were enumerated earlier in this chapter under job descriptions. A manager must formulate fiscal policy, secure new business, recommend and enforce field rules and regulations, make provisions for handling spectators and passengers, oversee construction projects, see that the airport is adequately policed and that airplane and automobile traffic is regulated. The manager interprets the functions and activities of the airport to the city or other local government and to the public; he or she is a public relations expert as well as a business manager. This public relations function is extremely important and will be taken up at the end of this chapter in a separate section. Not all of these duties are required of all managers of airports. Many airports are too small to have Central Aviation Administration-staffed control towers; others have no scheduled airline flights. In these airports the job is simpler, but the manager must usually do all of the work personally. In large airports, the manager has many assistants and supervises the work. The job of airport manager is obviously not completed between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. The hours are often irregular and most managers have some weekend and holiday work. They will often have to work at night. In emergency situations they will usually work additional hours. Difficult weather conditions, labor problems, personnel irregularities, and flight schedule changes are only some of the things that will affect job hours. Even when not actually working, most airport managers are on call.

Education and training

The major requirement for the job of airport manager is business and administrative ability; this means the ability to make decisions, to coordinate details, to direct the work of others, and to work smoothly with many kinds of people. Perhaps the best college program to follow is one that leads to a degree in aviation management. College courses in engineering; management; accounting; finance and economics; business and aviation law; and airline, general aviation, and airport management are good preparation for a career in airport management. A large number of the primary airports in the world have 1- or 2-year internship programs that train college graduates for various aspects of airport management. Because the position of airport manager is the top job in most airports, advancement generally comes by changing jobs—usually by working

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- Confers with airlines, tenants and others regarding airport regulations, facilities, and related matters.
 - Participates in planning for increased aircraft and passenger volume and facilities expansion.
 - Determines and recommends airport staffing requirements.
 - Compiles and submits for review an annual airport budget.
 - Coordinates airport activities with construction, maintenance, and other work done by departmental staff, tenants, public utilities, and contractors.
 - Promotes acceptance of airport-oriented activities in surrounding communities

for a larger airport. In a large metropolitan airport, an individual usually works up from managing various departments to become an assistant manager or director and finally manager or director. The important public service an airport provides along with its economic advantages to a community has caused city governments to recognize the need for professional management of airports. As the number of new airports increases and the facilities of many existing airports expand, new managerial positions will be created. Many of these will not be top jobs, but the airport of the future will require assistant managers specializing in one part of the huge operation. Because the job of managing a medium-to-large commercial airport is a fascinating one that requires high qualifications, there will be tough competition for jobs; however, the motivated individual with a solid educational background and varied experience in the fields of aviation and management will find openings in a field of work that is and will remain comparatively small—but one that provides an interesting and challenging profession. Unquestionably, one of the most important and challenging aspects of an airport manager's job is that of public relations.

The airport and its public

Basically, every airport has four “publics” with which it deals, and despite the wide variance in size and scope of activities of airports, these publics are basically the same for all airports:

- *The external business public.* These are the past, present, and future airport customers for all the services offered on an airport. It includes all segments of the business, government, educational, and general flying public.
- *The external general public.* These are the local citizens and taxpayers, many of whom have never been to the airport but who vote on airport issues or who represent citizen groups with particular concerns.
- *The internal business public.* These are the businesses and enterprises whose interests are tied directly to the airport—the airlines, other members of the general aviation community, government officials, and other aviation and travel-oriented local businesses and trade organizations, and the employees of all of these enterprises.
- *The internal employee public.* This group includes everyone who works for the airport and its parent organization.

These are the most important airport publics. These are the sources of vital information that management must have in order to know what and how it is doing, and they are the ones who must be informed and persuaded if any airport objective is to be achieved

The airport manager and public relations

Public relations is a management function that attempts to create goodwill for an organization and its products, services, or ideals with groups of people who can affect its present and future welfare. The most advanced type of public relations not only attempts to create goodwill for the organization as it exists, but also helps formulate policies, if needed, that of themselves result in a favorable reaction. Aviation and airports have such great impact on people's lives, and on the life of a nation, that it is difficult to find a person who has no knowledge or opinion of airports. Despite the tremendous growth in all segments of aviation over the past 25 years, and the resulting challenges, problems, and opportunities, aviation has not been exempted from the controversies that inevitably are part of any endeavor affecting or touching the lives of a large number of people. This controversy is the reason why every opinion, whether positive or negative, will be a strong one. The net result is that every airport has an image—either good or bad. The great problems of airports are always related to the original and elemental images resulting from the collective opinions of the public. These images are really the balancing or compensating factors that correspond with the problems the public encounters with airports. These images are deposits representing the accumulated experience of jet noise, hours of struggle to reach the airport on clogged highways under construction, the frustration of trying to find a

closer parking place, the lines to obtain tickets, the time waiting for luggage, and other inconveniences. In this respect, some of the public will have an image of the airport as a very exciting place that makes major contributions to our society through commercial channels, and even more valuable contributions of a personal nature, by offering a means to efficient travel, and thus greater personal development and greater enjoyment of life. Despite the hundreds of positive impacts of aviation, negative images do arise. Perhaps such negative images result from the fact that the industry has been so intent on the technological aspects of resolving problems that it has overlooked the less tangible components. The industry has the technology and resources to resolve many of the problems of the airport-airway system; however, the important link or catalyst in bringing together technology and community opinion is the airport public relations effort.

Regardless of the size of an airport, there are several basic principles underlying the public relations process:

- Every airport and every company and interest on the airport has public relations, whether or not it does anything about them.
- Public goodwill is the greatest asset that can be enjoyed by any airport, and public opinion is the most powerful force. Public opinion that is informed and supplied with facts and fair interpretation might be sympathetic. Public opinion that is misinformed or uninformed will probably be hostile and damaging to an airport.
- The basic ingredient of good relations for any airport is integrity. Without it, there can be no successful public relations.
- Airport policies and programs that are not in the public interest have no chance of final success.
- Airport public relations can never be some kind of program that is used only to respond to a negative situation. Good public relations have to be earned through continuing effort.
- Airport public relations go far beyond press relations and publicity. Public relations must interpret the airport interests to the public, and should be a two-way flow with input and interpretation of public opinion to airport management and community leadership. Public relations must use many means of reaching the various segments of the public interested in airport operations, and must try to instill the public relations spirit into all facets of the airport's operation.

Public relations objectives

The primary objectives of an airport's public relations activities are as follows:

- Establishing the airport in the minds of the external public as a facility that is dedicated to serving the public interest: Many airports work closely with the local chamber of commerce in developing a brochure or pamphlet citing various accomplishments and activities at the airport that would be of interest to the local business community and the community in general.
- Communicating with the external public with the goal of establishing and building goodwill: The airport manager and other members of his or her staff often serve as guest speakers at various civic and social organizations. They also become active members of local or civic organizations in order to informally promote the airport and determine the pulse of the community. Public announcements of new developments at the airport are made through all media. This is a continuing part of the communications process.
- Answering general and environmental complaints on an individual basis. It is important that the airport develop a good rapport with its neighbors and concerned citizen groups. Working closely with the airlines and other internal business publics, airport management attempts to work out such problems as noise by changing traffic patterns and adjusting hours of flight operation. Tours of the airport are given to various community groups in order for them to get a better understanding of operations. Civic-oriented activities are also conducted at the airport

to improve relations with airport neighbors and address their concerns. Citizen participation in airport planning and public hearings is another means by which airport management is continually apprised of community feelings about airport-related activities.

- Establishing good working relationships with internal business publics whose interests are similar to those of airport management.
- Promoting programs designed to enhance and improve employee morale.

Both the airport and the community have a responsibility to work together to solve their mutual problems, attain desired goals, and ultimately achieve a better community. It takes continuing contributions—and sometimes sacrifices as well—to the general welfare on the part of individual citizens and the aviation industry to earn the opportunities and rewards of a good community for the public. This two-way relationship has its problems too. Many are spawned by misunderstanding that can arise and grow to disproportionate size, and in this context, result in a negative image for the airport and a loss of public confidence in the aviation industry. Ensuring that problems are met head-on, with full and explicit information made continuously available to the public to prevent misunderstanding, is the point at which airport public relations enters the picture.

Like any other facility that serves the total community, an airport requires total community understanding. A well-executed public relations program can make the community aware of the airport and its benefits and create an atmosphere of acceptance. Attitudes are not changed overnight, so the public relations effort must be a continuous campaign to build understanding and develop attitudes of acceptance.

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