



# Air Service Enhancement Program 101: What is it?

I live in Wyoming where we do business face to face. We like to look each other in the eye while we drink coffee in diners and shake hands. We don't think twice about driving six hours for a one hour meeting. We also don't think twice about driving to a larger airport outside of our state when we fly.

For example, I live in Cheyenne and drive to Denver to fly. It's 90 miles and up until now I have been okay with that because I know my plane will be on time and my ticket is affordable. Throughout the years, I've been conditioned to drive. However, with the increased traffic to Denver and the increased parking costs at the airport, I would love to fly directly out of Cheyenne and look forward to this opportunity in the near future.

We all have reasons we would or would not fly out of our local airport, whether its destination, ticket price, or knowing the flight will be on time. Because of my past flight habits, I have gone through life thinking that Commercial Air Service in Wyoming doesn't affect me. However, Commercial Air Service in Wyoming is something that affects each and every one of us every day.

## Economic Development

Commercial Air Service is a huge economic driver for our State. For every \$1 we spend on service in Wyoming, the state realizes more than \$23 in return. Excluding Jackson, which accounts for more than half of Wyoming's air service, the state still realizes



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\$8 for every \$1 spent. That money goes directly back into our state.

According to the 2013 Economic Impact Study for Wyoming, the aviation industry generates \$1.4 billion in economic activity in the state annually and supports more than 12,000 jobs.

The study also indicated that 90 percent of businesses rely on commercial airline service, and confirmed that many businesses factor in air service when determining where to locate. The study found that 38,000 non-aviation jobs in the state had improved efficiency through the use of air service.

When companies look to relocate or stay in Wyoming, reliable, sustainable air service is one of the top deciding factors. In visiting our communities, I have been told that there are businesses who will relocate to another state if they lose commercial air service. In Worland, Schlumberger left when commercial air service was discontinued. These are real companies, real jobs, real taxes, and real revenue lost for our state. Undeniably, those kind of economic impacts affect all of us in Wyoming.

## Air Service Enhancement Program

In 2004, the Legislature recognized this importance and started a program called the Air Service Enhancement Program (ASEP) for the purpose of helping communities gain, retain or grow air service. The Aeronautics Commission has authority over these funds and report to the legislature annually. While the State of Wyoming's ASEP has been successful there will be even more challenges in the future that will continue to cause difficulties for air service in Wyoming. Some of

**Read ASEP 101 inside**



The new Hunt Field runway was completed Nov. 17.

## New runway constructed at Lander's Hunt Field

It's been 40 years since the City of Lander originally constructed the runway at Hunt Field Airport. After many years of use, and harsh winters, the runway was in desperate need of a full reconstruction. In the spring of 2016 the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the Wyoming Department of Transportation Aeronautics Division (WYDOT) presented Lander with the opportunity to address the aging infrastructure of the runway. Initially, there was hope for a mill and overlay of the runway to minimize impact to the airport. However, during geotechnical investigations, it was discovered there was very little runway strength remaining. Trucks and aircraft parked on the pavement during a hot day caused the runway to deflect under their weight. With this in mind, a full reconstruction of the runway was

recommended to ensure safety for decades to come. Lander officials, the FAA, and WYDOT worked with Armstrong Consultants, Inc. (Armstrong) to design a runway reconstruction that would add lasting value to the Lander community.

It is noteworthy to see a runway project of this magnitude completed within one season, particularly with the release of Federal funding in the spring, and Wyoming's winter looming in the fall. Through great support from local officials and community members, Century Companies, the Contractor awarded the project, willingness to commit a vast amount of resources to the project, and Armstrong's strategic project phasing, the job was completed in 124 contract days. By phasing the project with multiple

**Read Hunt Field on back**

### ASEP 101 from the front

these challenges include the pilot shortage, the retirement on smaller jets, and fluctuating fuel prices.

The ASEP has historically been well funded, but is now only being appropriated at \$1.2 million per year. Because of the higher previous funding levels, carryover funding was allowed Wyoming to support communities at more than \$1.2 million per year. In the last year, the State of Wyoming assisted 5 communities at \$3.6 million. The State does require a 40% community match for primary markets (a town to one regional hub such as Denver) and a 60% match for growth markets (towns such as Jackson and Cody trying to grow their tourism reach). Local matches put the support for air service to \$6.1 million for the year.

Put simply, the state and communities would need to invest more than \$60 million in commercial air service over the next 10 years just to sustain what we have today.

As of July 1, 2019, the carry over funds will be depleted. ASEP will only have \$1.2 million per year to grant. Inevitably, this will change or eliminate air service in several markets. Unless a new funding source is identified, it is likely that several of our most vulnerable markets are at the risk of losing air service around that time. I would consider our vulnerable markets to be Sheridan, Riverton and Rock Springs as they are the ones who receive the highest amount of funding from our program.

Cheyenne does not receive state assistance at this time and only has one flight a week to Denver via Great Lakes. If they requested a grant for FY2018 for commercial air service assistance to another city we may not have enough money to help all of our

**ASEP FY 2017**

Community	State Match	Local Match	Route
Cody	\$ 33,864	\$ 50,796	Chicago - Seasonal
Gillette	\$ 552,000	\$ 248,000	Salt Lake - Discontinued
Jackson	\$ 173,956	\$ 260,936	New York / New Jersey
Riverton	\$ 1,193,090	\$ 795,393	Denver
Rock Springs	\$ 1,020,438	\$ 592,903	Denver
Sheridan	\$ 726,429	\$ 484,286	Denver
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 3,699,777</b>	<b>\$ 2,432,314</b>	

Total for State and Local matches last year: \$6,132,091

communities at the level we are helping them today. Should a request come forward, the Aeronautics Commission will have to make a decision on what communities to fund and at what level. The Aeronautics Division does have a Priority Rating Model that will be used to assist in this, but the ultimate decision will lie with the Commission.

Laramie is primarily funded by a Federal Program called Federal Essential Air Service (EAS). Cody also receives EAS funds but at a lower level. This federal program was developed in 1978 after the deregulation act as a way to help rural communities maintain commercial air service. Throughout the years, the program has evolved. There are several benchmarks that have to be met to keep these funds, but the primary one is the amount of subsidy per seat. If it is over \$1,000 a seat, the Federal government will discontinue the EAS funding. Once a community loses its EAS funds, they cannot get the funding back. Worland was receiving Essential Air Service funds and crossed that \$1,000/seat mark and thus lost their funding and then, their commercial air service. After 90 days without commercial air service, TSA left. It is extremely difficult to get TSA back once it leaves. Additional risk lies in the federal government funding the EAS program. Each year it

is evaluated and the discussions of discontinuing or decreasing the program ensue. Should that happen, Laramie and Cody would likely require state assistance to continue.

**Independent Operators**

Another point, currently each commercial airport operates independent of one another. They each negotiate their own contracts with their respective airlines every year. The State of Wyoming assists with grant funding through the ASEP Program, but does not secure airlines or contracts (this is the role of each Airport Board). Additionally, a lot of us drive to out of state to regional hubs instead of flying out from our local communities. This is known as leakage. If more people flew out of their local airports (including me!), our state would have a better chance of preserving what we have and keeping money in Wyoming.

The program has been valuable for the state, but without additional funds it cannot continue for much longer in its current form.

In order for us to keep air service at all nine of our airports and realize our maximum economic impact, we as a state need to explore other options for commercial air service.

Stayed tuned for the next issue of our Newsletter in which we will discuss this further.

# Our number has changed

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## A Tour of Wyoming's 40 Airports

The first airport I visited in Wyoming was Douglas on March 9. Today is Nov. 3, and I just finished my Tour of Wyoming's 40 Airports with Saratoga.

When I started this tour, it was a way to learn about our airports, infrastructure, and projects. There were funny acronyms surrounding me like WACIP and WYSASP, and I thought, perhaps, if I looked at every airport, I would be able to decipher this new language. The only expectation I had of this tour and myself, was that, by the end of it, I would know more than when I started.

It's hard to explain how much I underestimated the value of this tour.

The projects listed on the WACIP (Wyoming's Airport Capital Improvement Plan) came to life. For example, when I stood at the airport in Buffalo and saw the antelope near the runway, I understood why they wanted a new fence to keep them out. After looking at 40 runways, I realized they were not all equal. Driving on the field, I mean runway, in Medicine Bow really highlights the smoothness of the newer runway in Thermopolis.

After driving thousands of miles throughout Wyoming, the WYSASP (Wyoming State Airport System Plan) makes sense. Each airport has been strategically placed to accommodate emergencies and business needs. They help connect the smallest and most rural parts of our state to the entire world.



Unexpectedly, I learned about each community we visited, their personalities and their priorities. After losing air service a few years ago, Worland would like to better promote their airport as the valuable general aviation airport it is. Dubois's airport sits above the town in the northwestern part of the state and, understandably, needs a larger snowplow. Cheyenne will soon have a new terminal, and, along with the Airport Board and manager Tim Barth, a group of community leaders are rallying to ensure they have reliable air service when it opens. Laramie's general aviation terminal is decorated with the bucking bronco and brown and gold. It's a place where the university is a part of nearly every conversation, both spoken and unspoken.

Finally, those car trips and long hours with my colleagues gave me uninterrupted one-on-one time to discuss the history of, not only the airports, but the Division. I learned about Brian's passion for food, Christy's easy going nature and Sheri's former years as a sky diver. They filled me in on the past, and we wondered about the future. Will Wyoming grow our rural commercial air service? Will our state continue to receive the same level of federal and state support for airport infrastructure? As we drove, we reflected, and we strategized. We learned. We explored, and we inspected. But most importantly, somewhere along the way, we became a team.

## What's next:

### Aeronautics commission meeting, annual budget & WACIP workshop

Hilton Inn  
Casper, Wyoming  
Dec. 6-8  
Time to be announced

### Summit on the future of transportation in rural states

Ramkota Hotel, Casper, Wyoming  
2-8 p.m., Dec. 7  
Must register by Nov. 27. To register, please visit <http://bit.ly/2yD2w8K>.

## New resources

### Check our online calendar

WYDOT's Aeronautics Division is now offering a calendar of its public events. See what the division has going on at <https://goo.gl/RCUsvE>.

### Sign up for updates

We've started a subscription list for the newsletter. Check it out and make sure you get updates at: <https://goo.gl/forms/s7uPI5sHXaWzRUyZ2>.

### Hunt Field from inside

concurrent tasks, construction was successfully finished within an impressive amount of time.

The previously existing runway was exhibiting several frost heaves, and the pavement was at the end of its serviceable life. Having last been constructed in 1976, the previous runway greatly exceeded the design life of 20 years. The full depth reconstruction of Runway 4/22 consisted of:

- Demolishing and removing the existing pavement section
- Adding 13.5 inches of subbase, for frost protection
- Adding 6.5 inches of base material
- Adding 4 inches of new asphalt surface course

The additional subbase material will help minimize the chance of frost heaves, while the base material and 4-inch asphalt section will ensure a long life for the runway. Runway painting utilizes striated markings to help sustain the runway during winter, by allowing the runway asphalt to heat more evenly.

The project also included a 32,000-cubic yard earthen embankment off of the west end of the runway to allow for the new runway to have a fully compliant runway safety area. Previous preliminary planning efforts had assumed a multi-million dollar retaining wall

would be required to achieve a fully compliant safety area, however during the design process it was determined that an expensive retaining wall would not be required. Instead, Armstrong and their geotechnical subconsultants, Rock Solid Solutions and Inberg-Miller Engineers, developed a design for an engineered earthen embankment that cost less than \$500,000 to construct.

Runway safety was further improved by the removal of approximately 43,000 cubic yards of dirt to clear the runway's primary surface and allow for a future instrument approach flight plan. This approach will allow for lower visibility operations into Hunt Field, a critical need for air medical service operations.

On November 1st, the FAA performed a final inspection, and the reconstruction of Runway 4/22 was officially complete. At the ribbon-cutting ceremony on Nov. 17, Mayor Del McOmie said, "I've worked construction for 40 years, before I retired from WYDOT, and this project has gone so well, I've never experienced that". Through the hard work of many individuals, including Century Companies, and Armstrong, Hunt Field has a runway that will connect the Lander community with aviation for many years to come.

*By Jesse Fibula*