

Why waste \$55,000,000.00 on a runway nobody wants?

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Recently the FAA made a deal with the long-embattled airport at Santa Monica, California, that would allow the city to take the airport and shut it down twelve years from now. In addition, they will be allowed to shorten the runway immediately in order to discourage or eliminate jets from taking off or landing.

Surveys have shown that the majority of the residents of Santa Monica want to keep their airport. Now, according to an online Rural Alaska article author Lisa Demer, there is another airport controversy.

In Aniak, Alaska, the FAA is going to spend \$55 million to move an existing functional runway – 261 feet from its current location.

Aniak is a remote village with a population of 500 located about 300 miles west of Anchorage on the Kuskokwim River. Its airport has a cold-war era runway that is 6,000 feet long and 150 feet wide. The new runway will be reduced in size to 5,400 feet long and 100 feet wide. The FAA put the airport on the “non-compliant” list back in 2004 due to rules regarding obstacles near the runway.

The project also affects existing infrastructure – a State Trooper facility will be removed and replaced and the fairgrounds will have to be relocated.

The FAA insists the project is necessary in order to meet current safety standards and due to the age of the runway. They insist that roads, fences, trees and buildings (including a power plant) are simply too close to the runway. The FAA wants the area along the runway to be clear of obstacles for at least 400 feet from the centerline. The power plant is about 300 feet away.

For the most part, residents of Aniak are not in favor of the project, even though it will bring temporary revenues to the village during construction. They would prefer to simply re-surface the runway, a cost that is estimated to be about \$8 million. They are also concerned that the shorter and narrower runway will eliminate some cargo flights, or that those flights could not carry as much cargo at a time.

The airport is vital to the village since it is the only way in or out during the time the river freezes and breaks up.

The airport also has a waterway runway, using the adjacent river for aircraft equipped with floats. These kind of aircraft are commonplace in Alaska. Anchorage has a seaplane airport on a lake with about 1,500 aircraft stationed there.

Despite this massive expenditure, President Trump has begun slashing the federal budget, including Alaska's.

According to a report on the adn.com website, President Trump's "proposed budget would zero out a wide variety of (Alaskan) programs, including the Essential Air Service, which subsidizes rural flights throughout Alaska; the Denali Commission, which coordinates state-federal infrastructure projects; and LIHEAP, a program that helps people pay for high heating bills...The Environmental Protection Agency's funding for water projects in Alaska villages would be gone, and climate change programs across the federal government would be no more. Grant programs that fund weatherization programs and a raft of rural-focused funding would be zeroed out."

It also reported that "In fiscal year 2016, the federal government sent nearly \$8 billion to Alaska through contracts, grants, loans and other types of financial assistance, according to the U.S. Treasury Department."

Now that Donald Trump is president, Alaskans hope that the his administration will finally make it possible to drill in ANWR, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

The same adn.com website reported that "the fight (to open ANWR) comes amid growing efforts to open to drilling the 19-million acre coastal plain of the refuge, with some Alaskans increasingly hopeful an all-Republican leadership in Washington, D.C., will overcome resistance from opponents to the idea. But even that is no guarantee it will ever happen – during the George W. Bush administration, Republican control of Congress and the White House failed to unlock the refuge."

So what does all of that have to do with a small runway in the middle of Alaska?

My hope is that the Trump administration will bring about a fiscal correction to our nation's budget through reduced regulations and responsible spending. There very well may be a need to relocate the runway in Aniak, but given that there have been no accidents there, perhaps there should be some reconsideration, or moderation, in what needs to be done to keep it safe. But we don't need make-work projects; there is plenty of work to do that a free-market economy can accommodate as it is.



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