Del Norte Triplicate

Opinion: Crescent City's Airport Runway is too Short, Needs New Chairman to Lengthen its Future

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In a recent Border Coast Airport Authority (BCRAA) meeting when I say it's like talking to a "Wall", what I meant to say is the current chairman of the BCRAA, former Supervisor David Finigan, is the "Wall". He's called "most experienced" member of the Joint Powers Authority (JPA), but experience doesn't always equate to competence or doing what's best for the BCRAA.

Learning from a recent "Word Salad" prepared by none other than one of our local geniuses, Supervisor Chris Howard, the Crescent City Airport needs the County's help. It was no surprise when the "help" turned into a plea for more MONEY! Another government run disaster in Del Norte County has slithered to the surface.

While I am not saying the County's airport should be shuttered, a change of the ruling monarch of the BCRAA is imperative. Under Finigan's watch our regional carrier with service to San Francisco/Sacramento was lost. Three now four replacement commercial carriers have come, three gone, and the fourth unlikely to be any more successful.

A $20 million dollar terminal built, six years in service, now falling apart. Mounting legal costs in an attempt to correct the uncorrectable. Escalating repair and maintenance costs and the borrowed match from the County to see the terminal built still waiting repayment. And yet, another unnecessary Finigan "White Elephant" to plague local taxpayers. Unfortunately, now Curry County, The Tribes, and the City of Brookings have been dragged into Finigan's most recent mess.

The BCRAA, looking into a bleak future of several additional Federal Aviation Administration mandates, is unquestionably on the hook for millions of dollars of infrastructure repair with the ubiquitous 5% match. Do I see yet more pleading for money from Del Norte County in the near future by the BCRAA? No question about it! Thank you very much Mr. Finigan.

The original intent was for Del Norte County, owner of the airport, to establish a JPA to include several nearby jurisdictions for the purpose of operating the airport. At the time it was hoped the airport would be self-sustaining and provide valuable economic activity for the region. Initially, the BCRAA had inherited a reasonably successful business model centered around commercial air traffic to the public's preferred destinations of San Francisco/ Sacramento. Changes forced by economics in the commercial aviation industry compelling it to become profitable would change that dynamic. Unfortunately, the 2015 version of the BCRAA was not equipped to change with the commercial aircraft industry. It was all downhill from there.

Finigan's White Elephant was the result. The regional carrier, Sky West, gone, 50 to 70 percent of the area's annual air passengers moved to nearby airports and with it a significant portion of the BCRAA's revenue. A decade later, the decision to build a new terminal has visited upon the BCRAA a cash flow problem with the inability to timely pay its bills, several mandated FAA projects with a 5% match, and insufficient funds to maintain normal operational activities.

Looking into a future without significant change, the outlook is grim. Current BCRAA board members seem paralyzed by the daunting prospect of finding some sort of rescue. Chair Finigan still has plenty of experience, just no answers, but to be an impediment to a future success of the airport.

Tip of the hat to Del Norte County member of the BCRAA, Chris Howard, in recognizing a request by the public to lengthen the airports runways may provide a solution to the airport's struggling financial weakness. No such recognition by the "experienced" Finigan in the chairman's seat.

There are three actions to be taken by this current BCRAA if the airport is to survive:The first is to remove Chairman Finigan from the BCRAA board and replace. The second is to seek funding to lengthen both runways to accommodate larger commercial aircraft. The third is to attract a regional carrier with code share at San Francisco (SFO) or Los Angles (LAX) to replace Advanced Air.

A heavy lift to be sure, but necessary to ensure Del Norte County has continued air service and does not become another of the County's "poor orphans" destined to live on the backs of the taxpayer. The public had spoken loud and clear, Oakland and Hawthorne are not acceptable destinations. Time for some clear thinking, not impediment producing experience.