



Google eye view of Eagle County Airport, ranked as the 176th busiest commercial airport in the country

Vail Homeowners Association Newsletter

News, Analysis, and Commentary for Vail Homeowners

February 28, 2013

Eagle County Airport Hitting Turbulence?

Local Air Service Critical, But in Decline: Commercial airlines serving Eagle County Airport (EGE) have reduced the number of available seats on flights to EGE by 27% over the past 5 years, with a 34,000 seat decrease this last winter from last. The Eagle County airport is ranked as the 176th busiest commercial airport in the country. It is an important link for many non-resident Vail property owners.

The decline in commercial traffic is an important economic indicator as EGE is a main access portal for Vail's destination visitors. As of late December 2012, according to airport sources, commercial airline traffic was down 4%, general aviation traffic is up 5% and military traffic associated with the high altitude helicopter training facility is up 26%.

Commercial Airlines Expect Subsidies From the Communities They Serve: The recently reorganized Eagle Air Alliance (EAA) is the entity involved with brokering local subsidies with the airlines. The funds for subsidies are gathered annually through voluntary contributions from local governments and businesses. According to a recent EAA report detailing funding for other Western Slope airports, Crested Butte, Steamboat and Telluride have funding from both locally collected sales tax and private business contributions while the Aspen/Pitkin County airport is privately funded by the

Aspen/Snowmass business community.

Air Alliance Voluntary Funding Initiative Expanded: The Air Alliance annual subsidy funding effort has been expanded to include a higher emphasis on increasing participation from a greater diversity of businesses throughout Eagle County. The fundraising for voluntary contributions is cumbersome with spotty participation from the business community. For the most part, business contributions come from the larger hotels and Vail Resorts.

Condominium Associations to be Targeted: The 2013 Air Alliance's fundraising initiative is targeting consumer businesses that receive a more indirect benefit from improved commercial air service. Included as targets in the initiative are the myriad of condominium associations whose residential owners would benefit from flying directly into Eagle, bypassing Denver airports and eliminating the hassle of the Interstate 70 commute. Fundraisers believe non-resident property owners are one of the largest users of local air service and therefore have a vested interest in financially contributing to expanded service.

Vail Homeowners Association Urges Improved Air Service to EGE: The Vail Homeowners Association continues to press for airport improvements. Air service into the Eagle Airport will become even more important to destination guests as I-70 traffic between Vail and Denver becomes more congested.

EGE Master Planning Recommendations in Preparation: Proponents of direct international air service into Eagle have been focused for well over a year on a 20-year master planning project for the airport. Planning for an international terminal is part of that project. It is speculated that international charter flights hold more promise than regularly scheduled service. Airport authorities have hired an aviation consultancy firm to assess the feasibility of international flights. Their report is expected within a matter of a few months.

Improving Economy Will Signal Need for Investment in More Flights: Local funding entities want to see signs of an improving economy before making investments in more flights, whether domestic or international. This summer arrangements have been made for a regularly scheduled direct flight from Houston, Texas, which is also a major international hub for Latin America. Locally, improvements were completed last year on the airport terminal's baggage handling and security inspection station.

Direct Flights Reduce Hassles for Consumers: If Vail is to improve air service for international travelers via major American hub airports, there will also need to be improved passenger processing through US customs and TSA security inspection points. Should Congressional funding cuts at major hubs for Customs and TSA security occur, EGE traffic from major U.S. domestic/international hubs could be adversely affected.

Recommendations of Airport Master Plan Will be Critical in Shaping the Future: Should direct international and increased domestic flights into Eagle become a reality, the service will add immeasurably to reducing the travel hassle factor, thereby making both charter and regularly scheduled direct air travel to Vail much more attractive for international and domestic vacationers as well as business commuters. The findings of the airport master planning project need to be given serious consideration when they become available as they will have much to do with determining the characteristics of future growth for the region and its communities.

Vail's Eye View



Jet contrails and clouds wisp overhead in a Vail winter sky.

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