

Comment Info: =====

General Comment:I am the Airport Director at the Craven County Regional Airport in New Bern, NC. We are a non-hub airport with service provided by US Airways and Delta. The aircraft used by our carriers include turboprops with 37 or 50 seats and regional jets with 50 or 70 seats. Flights go to Atlanta for the Delta aircraft and Charlotte for the US Airways planes. Direct flights to Philadelphia will commence in June 2008. All three of the airports we connect to or will soon connect to meet your congestion criteria.

We are a growing community, and the airport has worked very hard to provide the service that our citizens desire for leisure travel, require for business, or bring tourists (a major part of the economy) to our area. We also provide air service for the Marines and sailors at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point which is approximately fifteen miles down Highway 70 from the airport. They use us for business and well-deserved leave travel. Additionally, at Cherry Point we have the Fleet Readiness Center East with approximately 4,000 artisans who repair aircraft for the Department of Defense. Their business requires travel to other readiness centers, military installations, the pentagon, and aircraft manufacturing companies. Adding over 2.5 hours travel each way to their trips is not a good use of taxpayer dollars. Our runway is not long enough to support large aircraft. Our enplanements and deplanements for 2007 exceeded 222,000. That number reflects an increase of over 22% from our 2006 totals, and Delta service was not initiated until May of 2007. Our entire Crystal Coast area has benefited from the enhanced service.

We do not have the space required to extend the runway to accept large jets. Additionally, large jets would mean fewer of them which would not provide the business and tourism industries with the frequency and connections that support their continued growth. The nearest large airport to us is RDU which is 2.5 to 3.25 driving hours distant, depending on where one lives in our service area.

The rising fuel prices will be painful for the air carriers which means that smaller airports are at risk of losing some of their flights. If you restrict the ability of the air carriers to service us by limiting regional aircraft traffic into hubs, you will be doing a disservice to the people in our region who rely on air service for their economic well-being, and their leisure travel. They should not be punished simply because they do not live in a big city with a large airport. If all of our passengers used RDU (some of them would simply not travel or would have to relocate their businesses to large cities which already struggle with infrastructure challenges), the pollution generated by the additional cars on the road would likely cost the country more in environmental damage or cleanup costs than the cost of fixing our ATC system, and our military personnel would spend unnecessary time on the road and money on fuel.

I strongly suggest that DOT withdraw its rates and changes amendment in the interest of fairness. In my opinion, the hard work of our civil servants would be more productive for the future if focused on enhancing the capacity of our system to handle the increase in air traffic that will come with the growth of our population and international business.

Sincerely,  
Tom Braaten  
Craven County Regional Airport  
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