

June 30, 2004

Mr. Dennis J. DeVany, Chief
EAS & Domestic Aviation, X-53
U.S. Department of Transportation
Washington D.C. 20590

Ref. EAS Community Participation

Dear Chief DeVany:

In the economic development arena, air service is an essential marketing tool used in the recruitment of new business and industry and the overall development and growth, especially for a smaller community. As the lead economic development agency for Northwest Alabama, we are constantly asked accessibility questions for the community, specifically the proximity to a local, commercial airport. The Northwest Alabama Regional Airport, located in Muscle Shoals, Colbert County, Alabama, offers not only Northwest Alabama but also Northeast Mississippi and Southwest Tennessee an opportunity to qualify for numerous site selection searches for growing companies.

The entire Shoals Area, which includes the cities of Florence, Muscle Shoals, Sheffield, and Tuscumbia, and the counties of Lauderdale and Colbert, understands the importance of transportation and accessibility in developing and growing the community. A new 450-acre industrial park is currently under development on property adjacent to the Northwest Alabama Regional Airport. Commercial air service in close proximity to this park will accentuate the community's modes of transportation to companies searching for locations.

Northwest Alabama has been fortunate to have local airport facilities, and we feel that continued air service is vital to the community's growth. The Northwest Alabama Regional Airport presently serves the tri-state area with direct commuter service twice daily to Memphis via Mesaba Airlines, Inc., a Northwest Airlink code-shares affiliate of Northwest Airlines. The limited number of flights in and out of the area makes it difficult to schedule travel. An increase in the number of flights per day would increase the daily boarding numbers, allowing personal and business travel to be scheduled in a much more effective manner.

In your evaluation of communities, we hope that Northwest Alabama will continue to be a community that will receive the benefits offered through the Essential Air Service (EAS) Program.

Best regards,

Forrest Wright
Exe. Director