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OST-97-2842-48

Mr. Dennis DeVany
Chief, Essential Air Service and Domestic Analysis
Dept. of Transportation, Room 6401
400 Seventh Street, SW
Washington DC 20590

DEPT. OF TRANSPORTATION
DOT/CTS

2005 JUN 20 A 11:31

Re: Essential Air Service proposal for
Massena, Ogdensburg, and Watertown, New York

Dear Mr. DeVany,

Once again, the contract for Essential Air Service to the above communities is up for renewal and awarding. Before offering our opinion as to which Option the cities and town favor, we want to express our disappointment over the lack of competition for our routes.

The numbers prove that enplanements from this area are well above what they were last year. All three airports have upgraded or are planning to upgrade their facilities, including a new Terminal and 500 more feet of runway in Massena. We are at a loss to explain why Mesa Airlines was the only bidder for EAS funding for our areas – it just doesn't make sense. Perhaps the DOT would consider re-opening the window for RFP's, as it did two years ago, and could ask CommutAir and Colgon Airlines to get involved in the process. They, too, are EAS carriers in upstate New York. And they offer much better connections than Mesa.

We are frustrated, too, with Mesa Airlines' continuing lack of respect for our desire to fly to another main hub besides Pittsburgh. This is shown in Option 2, which, while including two flights to Albany – which these communities have repeatedly asked for and which the DOT itself recognized as a desire when it requested the current RFP's – shows a subsidy needed that is obviously too high, much more than we assume the DOT would approve for this area, no matter how much we want it. In a perfect world, we would ask the DOT to approve Mesa's Option 2. But we do understand how expensive it is, at least the way Mesa sees it.

What these communities definitely do NOT want to see is a REDUCTION of air service, as proposed in Mesa's Option 3. As mentioned earlier, our airports and passenger bookings are growing. Our marketing is also improving as people learn how much easier it is to fly from our North

Country airports. Good air service attracts jobs. To reduce the number of flights to and from these airports would no doubt cripple the area's economy in a time when we need all the help we can get. Transportation for soldiers to and from Fort Drum would undoubtedly suffer. There's a World Championship Carp Fishing Tournament coming just downriver from Ogdensburg later this spring, attracting international competitors who would be greatly inconvenienced by cutting flights. And a proposed NASCAR-type speedway near Massena would certainly not get the air service it needs with only two flights a day to and from the area. We are gravely concerned about Option 3, and we hope the DOT will reject it totally. We need BETTER air service in northern New York, not LESS.

That leaves Mesa Option 1 as the only realistic choice if the DOT is to renew EAS service with Mesa. It at least maintains our current service. While we may not feel this is overall the best idea for our air passengers, it is the best of this trio of options. If the DOT is not of a mind to go back and ask for new RFP's, this is the option we support.

Again, it needs to be said that we adamantly oppose any reduction of air service.

We certainly appreciate everything the U.S. Department of Transportation has done to provide service to Massena, Ogdensburg, and Watertown. We trust that this service will at least continue at its current level.

Sincerely,

Robert Hagemann
Administrator, Jefferson County NY

Joseph Tracy
Executive Director
Ogdensburg, NY, Bridge and Port Authority

Sanford Cook
Supervisor, Town of Massena, NY