

Why Does Santa Cruz Need Airports?

Editor's Note: This is the first in a series of four articles exploring the future of Santa Cruz County's public airports.

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A recent Sentinel editorial entitled "The Value of Tourists" notes that fewer than half the tourists who visited California last year came by air. But those who did left far more money here than their surface-traveling brethren.

An expert on group meetings and conventions recently told a Santa Cruz audience that one person in five who boards a public aircraft is going to or returning from some kind of group meeting.

It is evident, then, that Santa Cruz, with its economy largely based on the tourist-convention industry, should be vitally concerned with the current status and future potential of its airports.

And even while the area is attempting to diversify its economic base by attracting industry, the question of air facilities remains just as important, because the manufacturing industries are, to an ever increasing extent, demanding adequate air trans-

portation for their personnel.

In addition, air freight is becoming an increasingly vital factor in the operation of many types of industrial enterprise.

There is no doubt Santa Cruz County needs air facilities equal to its growth potential.

Do we have them now? Are we going to get them?

To begin its appraisal of the county's airports, The Sentinel talked to President Walter Dutro and General Manager Don Fultz of the Santa Cruz County Industrial Commission, which has been conducting a lengthy study of local airport facilities.

The commission answered a series of Key questions on the connection of air facilities to economic growth.

1. Just how important to the county's economic development are improved air facilities? Why?

A look at the economic development in other counties with fully improved air facilities is the best way to answer this question.

Recently the Frieden Corporation located in San Leandro. They had surveyed a number of sites, including

sites on the San Francisco Peninsula. They required a location for their executives to fly in on chartered aircraft within five minutes of their new plant facility.

They selected San Leandro over various industrial parks near the San Francisco and San Jose Airports because of the proximity of that community's airport to its industrial development.

While the San Leandro Airport does not offer regular scheduled flights, it does facilities required for corporate aircraft.

2. Precisely what improvements are needed at have the types of instrument Watsonville and Skypark airports?

Watsonville Airport has excellent runway facilities and the land required to develop a major industrial terminal. However, it lacks the fulltime tower control and instruments required by many executive aircraft. At Skypark, the runway needs lengthening, which is currently under way, and the same attention to improved air-ground communications.

3. What does the future hold for local aviation?

The answer to this ques-

tion lies immediately with the attention and study that is given to the impact of aviation to the local economy by the various government agencies involved. The local chambers of commerce and other groups need to define the future requirements for air transportation as related to the general plan projections.

4. Is the present lack of facilities a deterrent to development?

The answer to this question must be yes. The improved facilities would increase not only the potential for industrial development, but other areas of the economy as well—such as visitor and convention travel.

5. Is a county-wide agency the best means of effecting the needed improvements?

Not necessarily. However, a county-wide effort and county-wide understanding of the importance of air facilities is necessary to achieve a balanced county wide development.

6. Are additional airports needed?

The possibility of developing an airport nearer to the industrial properties in San-

ta Cruz has been discussed at various times, and this development would certainly improve Santa Cruz' potential for industry. However, at the present time, the county is hard pressed to support the two existing air facilities.

7. What opinion do local industrial firms have of existing air facilities?

For the most part, the local industrial firms recognize the limitations of the airports and are not seriously handicapped by the current operations.

10. To what extent do local firms use existing facilities?

Several of the major firms in Santa Cruz County make regular use of both the Skypark and Watsonville airports and a few companies have their own planes stationed at these airports.

Generally speaking, the owners of these companies have had a prior interest in aviation, however, and are personally involved in the air transportation needs of their companies.

(Tomorrow's article will explore the existing facilities at Watsonville Municipal Airport and the plans for their expansion.)