

Watsonville Airport To Remain Main County Facility

(Editor's Note: This is the second in a four-part series of articles exploring the future of Santa Cruz County's public airports).

By Don Righetti
Sentinel Staff Writer

Santa Cruz County's largest airport was constructed as a naval air station during World War II. The City of Watsonville purchased the 330-acre property from the War Assets Administration in 1948.

From that time until two years ago the facility operated at a loss, with the City of Watsonville and Santa Cruz County making up the deficits.

For the past two years, however, according to Mana-

ger Vern Ackerman, the facility has turned a profit, due largely to the increase in the county's air activity.

The county, like the rest of the nation, is becoming increasingly air minded. Watsonville Municipal Airport, as the county's largest air facility, is faced squarely with the necessity of gearing to meet the increase in air activity.

What does the airport have in the way of existing facilities to meet the demands of the air age?

As far as buildings go, not much. Seven of the airport's buildings, including the current terminal building, are war surplus holdovers. Many of these are wood frame and are in a disreputable state of repair.

The ledger reads more favorably with regard to runways. The port has two major runways, one 4000 feet long and another 4500 feet long. The latter is due for extension to 6000 feet, and at that length, it will accommodate any aircraft but the very largest jets.

The field now has hangars for 28 planes and plans to add storage space for 38 more during the next five years.

Watsonville Municipal is also the only airport in the county with a completely lighted runway. The lights stay on throughout the hours of darkness.

Recognizing the vital role aviation now plays in municipal economic growth, Watsonville commissioned the firm of Leigh Fisher Associates to per-

form an air trade study of the area and plans for physical development of the airport.

The study, completed in February, 1966, reports: "The primary function of a public airport is to develop aviation within the economic area in order to improve transportation and communication facilities for the population of the area.

"At the same time, an adequate and permanent public airport encourages the use of business aircraft and thus enhances the area's potential for developing new business and industrial sites, as well as expansion of existing industry and commerce."

The Fisher report notes that corporate or business aircraft are expected to account for one of the fastest growing segments of air activity at Watsonville.

It points out that business aircraft will base on those airports providing the most complete physical facilities. Among these, the report notes, are hard surfaced, well maintained runways and taxiways adequate field lighting during all hours of darkness, adequate terminal facilities, weather advisory service, communication facilities, adequate storage and parking and adequate service facilities.

The runways, taxiways and ramp at Watsonville already are

in generally good condition, but, as the Fisher report notes, "the buildings . . . have served their useful life and have little or no monetary value."

Cost of the ultimate expansion and rehabilitation of Watsonville Municipal Airport, according to the Fisher study, will be \$1,119,295. The study notes, however, that "it is not necessary or desirable to expend these funds at this time."

Instead, the airport is to be developed gradually in three separate stages with each stage extending over a five-year period.

The first stage includes:

1. Removal of the existing terminal building.
2. New terminal building.
3. Purchase of some 23 acres of Pajaro Valley Unified School District property which will be required for an entrance road and parking lot.
4. New airport service equipment building.
5. Initial paving of the parking lot.
6. Entrance and exit road to serve the terminal building and related areas.
7. Initial access roads and taxi strips to the new hangar area.
8. Taxi strip between the longer runway and its parallel taxi strip.
9. Miscellaneous roads and taxi strips as required.

The second stage, according to the Fisher study, is to upgrade and improve airfield facilities to handle increased aviation activity. Improvements would consist of:

1. Additional parking lot paving.
2. Completion of access roads and taxi strips to new hangars.
3. Expansion of existing ramps.
4. Construction of new ramps.
5. Service roads for non-aviation commercial and commercial-industrial areas.
6. Lights for the shorter runway and taxiway.

Aim of the third stage of development, the Fisher report says, is to provide ultimate improvements that will be required by the continued increase of aviation activities at Watsonville Municipal Airport.

These improvements would include:

1. Ultimate parking lot expansion.
2. Expansion of existing ramps.
3. Construction of additional ramps.
4. Additional service roads where required.
5. Extension of the longer runway.

Ackerman, speaking of the Fisher recommendations, noted that Watsonville Municipal Airport is barely into the first

stage of development, but that plans are now proceeding on a new terminal building, a major maintenance shop building and new hangars.

One of the biggest stumbling blocks now facing development of the air facility is the 23 acres of school property adjacent to the airport, which the Fisher study recommends be purchased to provide a parking lot and entrance road.

Pajaro Unified District is willing to sell the property, but the district is in debt to the state, and so the state has taken over administration of the land in an effort to recover its funds.

The state has set the price of the land as \$6500 per acre, a figure Ackerman termed "unrealistic" and beyond the airport's ability to pay.

Besides holding up development of the airport, the price stalemate removes from the market a piece of land that Ackerman calls "an ideal industrial site."

The manager pointed out that many types of industries now find it desirable to locate on or near an airport. If the pricing can be worked out he envisions a busy industrial complex on the present school property.

Ackerman agrees that one of the fastest growing areas of activity at the field will be that

of corporate flying. Of the 72 planes based at the field now, 15 are owned by businesses.

Two electronics firms already are located at the field to be near air transportation. In addition, the airport is home to two charter and flight instruction firms and two cropdusting companies.

The Fisher study foresees 150 planes based at Watsonville by 1980—more than double the current number.

Ackerman thinks the airport will have scheduled airline service in five to 10 years.

Since Sky Park north of Santa Cruz is limited by terrain in its expansion plans, Watsonville Municipal Airport will continue as the county's major air facility for the foreseeable future, with an air trade area encompassing all of Santa Cruz County and the northern portion of Monterey County.

(Tomorrow's article will trace the history of efforts to establish an airport in Santa Cruz.)

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Liberal Rhetoric Responsible For Major U.S. Problems Charges Ramparts' Editor

Robert Scheer, managing editor of Ramparts magazine, claimed that three of the major problems of the U.S. have their

by liberal newspaper columnists such as James Reston. In commenting on recent anti-draft demonstrations, Scheer claimed

activities" could be justified on two points. He explained the first was the idea, "They were devils and we were good guys,"