

Airport won't lose key system

The instrument-landing system at the Watsonville Municipal Airport is not likely to be shut down, as city officials had feared.

The system sends out signals that help pilots find the runway in inclement weather. The liability insurance for the man who maintains the system has increased so much that city officials said they weren't sure they'd be able to continue maintenance of the system.

The city is seeking takeover of the instrument-landing system by the Federal Aviation Administration.

However, Airport Manager Vern Ackerman said yesterday that the city is now working on a new agreement for maintaining the system. That agreement is expected to be in place by the end of the year, and therefore will assure the continuing operation of the system, even as the city seeks eventual takeover of the system by the FAA, Ackerman said.

Ackerman also said yesterday that he supports the recommendations made in the regional airport plan prepared for the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments and recently released. Among other things, the plan calls for the FAA to build a control tower at the Watsonville airport.

Ackerman agrees that Watsonville needs a control tower, but said he thinks the report is a little low in its estimates of growth at the airport. While the report says there are about 320 planes now based in Watsonville, there are actually 365 (not 300 as reported yesterday). Likewise, where the report predicts there will be about 420 planes here in 1990, Ackerman expects it will be more like 460 planes.

The rapid growth of the airport, Ackerman said, only exacerbates the need for a control tower.