



Print Email link Respond to editor Read comments (2)

Share: Facebook Twitter Print Email RSS LinkedIn StumbleUpon Dribbble

## Locals push against proposed \$100 per-flight fee

Wednesday, February 29, 2012

By Magdalene Landegent

Locals are fighting a proposed federal rule that would charge a \$100 fee for most flights -- including many of those in and out of the Le Mars Municipal Airport.

President Barack Obama's recent 2013 budget plan proposes to impose the \$100 fee on turbine powered planes that use the U.S. air-traffic control system. This would include many corporate and private aircraft.

Estimates show the fee would raise about \$11 billion in 10 years, according to Obama's recommendation.

Locals, including pilot Earl Draayer, the Le Mars Municipal Airport's manager, oppose this proposed fee.

He, along with the Airplane Pilots and Owners Association, National Business Aircraft Association and Experimental Aircraft Association have proposed instead increasing the federal fuel tax for flights.

"We already have in place a fuel tax system. Everybody who flies will pay," Draayer said. "And you pay depending on how much you fly. You fly a lot, you pay more."

The Le Mars airport manager pointed out the groups are not opposed to bringing in more dollars for the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

"We all understand that the federal government, the FAA division, needs more money for what's called 'next generation' operations," Draayer said. "Next generation is a whole new subject -- basically computers are talking to computers. On the ground, in the air, in the airplanes, and they can operate independently of humans."

All people, pilots and passengers alike, will benefit from next generation technology, Draayer said.

This technology is supposed to increase usage of airspace and decrease airline fares, he said.

The opposing groups say adding a fee would have negative consequences, including adding a new federal organization to administrate and collect the fee.

"Why create another federal bureaucracy? It just doesn't make any sense when you already have in place a sales fuel tax, and you'll be returned 90 percent of your money instead of 60 percent," Draayer said.

Sticking with the fuel tax and not adding a new user fee would eliminate the need for a new bureaucracy, which Draayer projects would end up using 60 percent of the money.

"Increasing the fuel tax would be the most effective way to pay for this," he said.

The user fee would only be applied to turbine aircraft including jet engines and turbo-prop engines but not piston engines.

Airlines are coming out in favor of the proposed user fee, Draayer noted, pointing out that their aircraft carry many passengers, unlike private aircraft.



(Photo by Earl Draayer) An aerial view shows the Le Mars Airport which has an economic impact of \$1,364,400 per year in Le Mars. Locals are fighting against a proposed federal regulation that would impose a \$100 per flight fee.

[\[Click to enlarge\]](#)

### More stories

- [State committed to regional treatment facility \(10/07/11\)](#)
- [Local airport project to serve more planes \(10/07/11\)](#)
- [Gas tax is Le Mars legislative forum topic \(01/16/12\)](#)
- [Fuel tax increase unlikely choice for roads fix \(12/08/11\)](#)
- [New Le Mars fire rating could trim costs \(01/27/12\)](#)

Draayer flies a piston airplane, which wouldn't be affected by the proposed fee. However, he thinks if the fee is put in place, it would soon be extended to apply to piston airplanes as well.

He predicts adding a user fee for flights that use the nation's traffic control system would mean less pilots would use the system.

"If you're flying a piston airplane like a lot of guys do here at this airport, you can fly from East Coast to West Coast and not talk to anybody," Draayer said. "It's legal and it's one of our American privileges we'd hate to see taken away from us, same as you can drive a car East Coast to West Coast and you don't have to talk to anybody."

By not talking to a control tower, pilots could avoid the \$100 fee, Draayer said. But less pilots talking with the national air-traffic control system would ultimately make the system less safe, he said.

For example, Draayer said, he could fly from Le Mars to a smaller, outlying airport in Denver and not be required to talk to air-traffic control.

But if there's no fee required, Draayer said he would talk to air-traffic control to increase safety.

Draayer and other locals also are arguing against the \$100 fee, saying it could pack a negative economic punch.

Le Mars Mayor Dick Kirchoff was one of 100 mayors to sign a letter to Obama, asking that he consider the economic impact the airports have to communities and how the proposed \$100 user fee could have a bad effect.

"At such a vulnerable time for our economy, we need to be doing everything we can to support jobs and help to stimulate our economy, not crippling an important industry which represents a lifeline to communities such as ours around the nation," the letter states.

Kirchoff was among mayors from communities in 48 states who signed the letter.

"We don't need any more charges on these flights," he said. "Especially here in Le Mars."

Le Mars has a lot of traffic that comes in through the airport for business and recreation and that brings a significant economic impact, Draayer said.

"They just don't carry a sign, 'I came from the airport and I'm going to do \$100,000 worth of work downtown,' or 'I went up to 4 Brothers Bar & Grill and spent \$75,'" he said. "So most people don't see it."

The Le Mars Municipal Airport has an economic impact of \$1,364,400 per year, according to the Alliance for Aviation Across America.

The average citizen may not use the airport runway in Le Mars, Draayer said.

"But at the same time, you also don't utilize 75 percent of the gravel roads in Plymouth County, but they're still important, aren't they," he said. "Even though the majority of the people in Le Mars do not get a direct benefit from the airport, they still get an indirect benefit, but they don't see it."

Draayer said the proposal has come before U.S. Congress for the past three or four years. It was first proposed in the Clinton administration, he said.

He has written to U.S. Sens. Charles Grassley and Tom Harkin and Rep. Steve King, asking them to help stop this fee from moving forward.

King responded, saying that any change in the source of dollars used to pay for FAA operations must be approved by Congress, and so far neither the House of Representatives or Senate has chosen to act on Obama's proposal.


According to King, the last multi-year FAA funding legislation expired in fiscal year 2007, but no long-term legislation has been put in place since then, so the FAA's funding authority has been continued through short-term extensions -- thus no major changes have been made.

King told Draayer as Congress begins its work on FAA authorization language, he would keep Draayer's request in mind.

published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

---

## Comments

 Note: The nature of the Internet makes it impractical for our staff to review every comment. If you feel that a comment is offensive, please [Login](#) or [Create an account](#) first, and then you will be able to flag a comment as objectionable. Please also note that those who post comments on lemarssentinel.com may do so using a screen name, which may or may not reflect a website user's actual name. Readers should be careful not to assign comments to real people who may have names similar to screen names. Refrain from obscenity in your comments, and to keep discussions civil, don't say anything in a way your grandmother would be ashamed to read.

 **Show comments (2)**

---

## Respond to this story

Posting a comment requires [free registration](#). If you already have an account on this site, enter your username and password below. Otherwise, [click here](#) to register.

**Username:**

**Password:** [\(Forgot your password?\)](#)

**Your comments:**

Please be respectful of others and try to stay on topic.