



*Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association
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Northeast Regional Representative
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Introduction:

By way of introduction, the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) is the world's largest general aviation organization with a domestic membership exceeding 400,000, as well as a significant membership abroad. AOPA, which represents approximately 4,812 pilots and aircraft owners in Connecticut, is an organization focused on safe aviation practices, as well as advocacy on issues relating to pilots and aircraft owners worldwide. A more comprehensive explanation of our organization's mission and objectives can be located on the Internet at www.aopa.org.

AOPA Opposes Senate Bill 563

AOPA is in strong opposition to Senate Bill 563, which will renew a moratorium precluding safety projects at Sikorsky Memorial Airport recommended by the National Transportation Safety Board well over a decade.

The safety project essentially consists of adding a 300' runway safety area at the end of runway 24, which will require a slight adjustment to Route 113. The safety area will be constructed of an Engineered Materials Arresting System (EMAS), which is designed to crush upon impact with an aircraft. This material can not be used for any other purpose than the safe stopping of an aircraft. This safety initiative is similar to the installation of a runaway truck lane on a steep highway decline.

The safety project has been resisted primarily by local officials in Stratford claiming the safety area is an "extension" of existing runway 24 which will increase aviation operations. Despite assurances there are no plans for any extension to the runway from the Federal Aviation Administration and the Mayor of Bridgeport combined with the use of EMAS as discussed above, Stratford continues to resist implementation of the FAA's safety project at the airport.

Approximately 3-years ago, the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CDOT) initiated the start of this project but it was abruptly stalled as local officials requested state legislators to enact a moratorium on the safety project until such time Stratford and Bridgeport could settle their differences. The moratorium was renewed in 2008, and now

there is a current Bill before the Legislature proposing an extension of the moratorium until April 2010.

As a result of this stalemate, the FAA will not resurface the deteriorating runway surfaces at Sikorsky until the runway safety area issues have been addressed. Therefore, the poor runway conditions represent a threat to businesses operating at the airport, since debris from the runway can easily be sucked into an engine causing substantial damage.

While the legislature typically avoids becoming embroiled in local political issues, this is a unique situation. Sikorsky is a regional airport facilitating individual and business interests from a number of Southern Connecticut municipalities. The prolonged impasse effects business and commerce beyond the borders of Bridgeport and Stratford requiring robust state intervention.

The Town of Stratford is essentially holding the safety project hostage for the purpose of attempting to resolve age old collateral issues with Bridgeport that have no bearing on the safety project. This safety project should not be linked or used as leverage to resolve other issues. We encourage Connecticut Legislators to allow the FAA safety project at Sikorsky Memorial Airport to move forward by not endorsing Senate Bill 563. The FAA will incur 95% of the cost associated with this project, which will provide a nearly "shovel ready" construction project serving to promote jobs and business for Connecticut residents at a time most needed.