

Proposed Bill No. SB-563 –Act Extending the Moratorium of Realignment of Route 113

Testimony Stratford Town Resident Matthew Silberger
March 4, 2009

Members of the committee, I thank you for granting me the opportunity to hear my testimony in favor of proposed Bill SB-563 which seeks a moratorium on the state from moving Route 113 without the permission of the Town of Stratford. Extending the moratorium has successfully passed through earlier Transportation Committees and I am confident this will pass again with minimal resistance.

Like many responsible citizens in the Town of Stratford, I am concerned with land use, economic vitality, and safety within our community. Projects and proposals in and around areas of natural resources, and the airport, kindle a curiosity and concern amongst many Stratford residents. In this fragile economy where individuals are carefully monitoring their expenditures; government should take this opportunity to act as a role model and proceed with reasonableness and smart fiscal responsibility when considering unnecessary projects such as the relocation of Route 113.

- **Moving Route 113 is unnecessary to improve airport safety**
 - The airport seeks movement of route 113 primarily to construct non-usable runway surface in the form of EMASS emergency overrun area to make the airport safer. Many other improvements can improve airport safety which do not require the expansion of the footprint of the airport, or movement of Route 113, but have been ignored. One example would be to build full length taxiways added to each runway end, reducing the number of possible runway incursions, which is a serious threat included in the NTSB's Most Wanted List of Transportation Safety Improvement's.
 - The Sikorsky Memorial Airport is already safe for the majority of aircraft which choose to operate here. Aircraft owners and operators make the airport safe. Piloting the appropriate aircraft, at a suitable airport, on an adequate runway is a key element in maintaining proper safety margins.
 - During the Sikorsky Memorial Airport Master Plan Update process the Gulfstream III turbojet aircraft was chosen as the representative aircraft in defining new airport criteria. Bridgeport's ambition to attract large turbojet aircraft onto a runway with short usable runway lengths yields borderline safety margins according to Gulfstream Aerospace performance manuals, especially when these runway surfaces are wet or snow covered. Citing safety concerns, certain operators including NASA, refrain from operating their fleet of Gulfstream Jets on runways shorter than 6'000 feet, such as those found at Sikorsky Memorial Airport.
- **Evacuation Concerns**
 - Living in the area for nearly fifteen years, neighbors and I rely on Route 113 as a major evacuation artery, and lengthening the distance of this roadway may increase evacuation times, and response times critical of emergency services vehicles. To date, the town residents have no record or study presented which addresses these principal concerns.

- **It's more than just an airport, it's a neighborhood.**
 - The relationship the city of Bridgeport shares with its adjacent neighboring communities when it comes to the topic of the airport can be described as nothing less than contentious. It is true that a well managed airport can bring many positive attributes, including economic stimulus, to the local economy. But economic success is not the only measure of success, and a balance between the airports goals and the sensitive concerns of the surrounding communities must be addressed. As an advocate of aviation and a Stratford homeowner, I remain optimistic that responsible growth and improvements are possible at the Sikorsky Airport.
 - As in any other large complex facility (i.e. a race track, landfill, or power plant) a working relationship with the local residents must be established and fostered in a responsible manner. From what I have witnessed, the City of Bridgeport continues to slam the door in the face of the local residents' concerns, and through a lack of action or communication has remained indifferent in pursuing any suggestions or opportunities to share or discuss its future agenda. This flagrant attitude by the Airport has led many residents to be suspicious, discontented and apprehensive of any activity in which the airport engages. This controversial relationship has been encouraged by airport management, through the continued failure to properly inform and educate the local residents about the issues.
 - Route 113 is within close proximity to wetland environments which are a tremendous resource, representing an important chain in the ecosystem responsible for sustaining life of many species and must not be disturbed. Beneath the airport lay the remains of hundreds of acres of wetland habitats which have been destroyed. The airport is fully capable of adequately serving the community in a safe and efficient manner within its current footprint, and doesn't require any additional land beyond its current fence line boundary to ensure its economic vitality. The airport should focus on improving the airport within the already existing perimeter, and stop decimating extremely sensitive ecosystems to accommodate unnecessary endeavors.
- **Route 113 flooding concerns**
 - Route 113 is susceptible to flooding in the vicinity of the airport during strong storms and periods of considerably high tides because of a clogged and improperly operating tide gate. According to the Connecticut DEP the city of Bridgeport fails to maintain this tide gate placing the safety of residents traveling along this roadway in serious danger. We have had treacherous accidents along this stretch of Route 113 including those attributed to black ice which is caused by this avoidable flooding.
 - The Airport has been contacted several times regarding these flooding issues by residents, and Stratford Town Council elected representatives, but airport management fails to accept responsibility and provides no assurances that the problem will be resolved.
 - Should the Connecticut Department of Transportation elect to invest in improving the roadway to advert subsequent accidents, it should consider doing so in a manner without moving the roads location closer to wildlife habitats or the shoreline.

I appreciate your consideration of my testimony, and urge the committee to pass bill SB-563.