

March 4, 2019

Opposed to Bill 7143

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To Members of the Transportation Committee:

I am writing in opposition to House Bill 7143 that removes restrictions on expanding Tweed Airport.

I
Introduction

Before composing my testimony, I read the submitted comments. The majority of submissions, supporting Bill 7143, are authored by people who reside outside of New Haven or hide behind a business address. During oral testimony, I hope you will insist that people state their hometown. This is important because it is the residents of New Haven that will bear the environmental and economic burden that passage of this bill will deliver.

The FY 19/20 proposed budget for New Haven includes another \$325,000 for Tweed. How much are the taxpayers of Guilford, North Haven, Milford, etc. contributing to this regional airport's operation? They will claim that their State taxes support Tweed, which is true, but only the residents of New Haven pay twice for Tweed through their State and City taxes.

Why is it that the overburdened cities are repeatedly asked to help improve the economies and quality of life for suburban towns, often at an economic and environmental price? The East Shore is already home to the airport, a power plant, a sewer treatment plant, and the Gateway Terminal that borders East Shore Park. All of these entities serve the surrounding towns but contribute to pollution in the immediate area around the East Shore. Increased air traffic at Tweed means a significant increase in cars along with more air pollution, noise, and traffic congestion.

II

Who really pays for the expansion at Tweed?

Everything published around the expansion refers to Federal funding. No one involved in promoting the expansion has been willing to put on paper the amount of money the cash-strapped City and State will be required to contribute to make newly expanded air service

a reality. Should this bill pass, we already know that any benefits package that the State legislators demand will be paid for, at least in part, by New Haven taxpayers. Bottom line--this expansion will not be paid for entirely with Federal dollars. Too many supporters are buying into the myth that this is a Federally supported project, in other words free.

A detailed, itemized proposal that includes the projected dollar amount the Federal government, the State and the City of New Haven will be required to contribute needs to accompany Bill 7143. This must be done before this bill can be voted on so that those being directly impacted have a clearer picture of the scope of the project and its financial impact. Projections of increased benefits to the area are just that, projections. They may or may not be realized. The costs, on the other hand, are real and will be a financial burden on New Haven long before any profits become real. The “if we build it, they will come” will take years to see fruition. It only takes a downturn in the economy or a change of plans by the fickle airline industry to derail any planned expansion. But, New Haven’s obligation will remain.

III Replacing lies with truth

Supporters of this bill have long claimed that the runway needs to be expanded in order for Tweed to become economically self-sufficient. Before the Dash 8s (37 seats) were retired there were warnings that regular service to Tweed might be shut down because larger planes could not land without paving the additional 1000 feet of overrun. On November 29, 2017, a CRJ 200 (50 seats) landed and proved the supporters wrong. Now American has announced that a CRJ 700 (70-75 seats) will be replacing a CRJ 200 on some flights to Charlotte. In response to an article in The New Haven Independent, a Tweed booster proudly announced that in the near future an Embraer 150 (76-88 seats) will be added to the fleet of planes flying out of Tweed. It appears that large, larger, and even larger planes are able to land and take off on Tweed’s current runway. What the supporters of Bill 7143 will not say aloud is that the 737s are a part of **their** vision and require a longer runway. It is not their hometown. So pleas to limit increased pollution, noise and stress on the surrounding neighborhoods fall on deaf and self-interested ears.

Recall that last year’s attempt to overturn the MOA was hidden in what turned out to be a bogus solar panel bill. Tweed and the City conspired to create a “community benefits package” as a bribe for the East Shore residents. Problem was, the community was not consulted and many of the “benefits” served Tweed as much if not more than the community. Truth and trust cannot be bought; it must be earned.

IV

Environmentally friendly? You can't have it both ways.

On Wednesday, February I attended a public workshop facilitated by Giovanni Zinn, City Engineer. The City of New Haven is the recipient of an \$8 million State grant to create living shorelines at East Shore Park and along Long Wharf on Long Island Sound. The purpose of a living shoreline is to mitigate the damage caused by rising sea levels and to create a natural buffer during significant storms. Living shorelines also protect against erosion. By 2050, the sea along the East Shore is projected to rise 20 inches and that does not include storm surge.

The main runway at Tweed is 12 feet above sea level but other sections of the property are lower. Some of the property includes wetlands. The passage of Bill 7143 will allow Tweed to pave 1000 feet of a grassy overrun that abuts Morris Creek and the Morris Creek Nature Preserve. Morris Creek also flows into Long Island Sound.

I am having a difficult time reconciling the fact that the same City that wants to hold themselves up as a model for other shoreline communities throughout New England, by creating a living shoreline in one section of the East Shore, has no problem throwing down 1000 feet of impermeable surface less than 2 miles away. Toxic substances will flow off this paved runway into Morris Creek and eventually make its way to Long Island Sound. These toxins will damage and not promote the healthy marshland that is so vital to a living shoreline. This City's blind campaign to promote the expansion of Tweed Airport, at any cost, has resulted in mixed messages. They cannot have it both ways. There is no such thing as being half a role model.

Until the City has done extensive independent economic, environmental and quality of life studies on what an expanded Tweed would mean for the City and the East Shore, New Haven needs to put this whole campaign to expand Tweed on hold. Stop making snap decisions based on a studies commissioned by Tweed and supported by surrounding towns, Yale, YNHH, and corporate entities that are only looking out for themselves.

Please vote NO on Bill 7143. Thank you.