

ASPEN, WE HAVE A PROBLEM



Photo by Pete McBride

Every day hundreds of planes take off or land at the Aspen Airport, 99% in opposite directions. ASE is known as one of the most dangerous airports in the country. Our unique, amazing valley and economy depend on the Aspen/Pitkin County Airport (ASE). This precious little “aircraft carrier in the sky” brings in at least two-thirds of our visitors. Yet it faces longstanding challenges in safety, noise, pollution, climate impact, congestion, functionality, and guest experience.

Inevitably its future is also intertwined with larger conversations about community character and goals, economic justice, growth, and democracy. Now all those complexities converge as the Airport is being redesigned to improve safety, reduce impacts, make it better for users and workers, and potentially—the main point of controversy—allow bigger airplanes. Our County government says continued airline service or federal regulators require this, but then *any* bigger planes could land, even if dirty, noisy, and climate-unfriendly.

Airside Changes

Most improvements on the “landside,” like terminal and traffic improvements, command strong consensus, with details likely to be worked out. But expanding and reconfiguring the “airside” where the planes operate remains disputed and muddled. Myths abound; evidence is overlooked; transparency is limited; truths are scarce.

Some basic misconceptions are rife in our community. To be clear: Existing commercial planes are *not* retiring anytime soon. There’s no rush to replace them with bigger ones. The Federal Aviation Administration is *not* forcing ASE to let in heavier planes with up to 118-foot wingspans rather than the current 95-foot limit. None of those scary claims is true. We have ample time to figure this thing out.

Truth and Consequences

Pitkin County proposes to invest more than a half-billion dollars, more than its whole annual budget, in Airport changes, mostly for the airside, and often based on outdated assumptions. Federal approval and funding are uncertain. However, large planning expenditures are now being made and strategic decisions considered with little public visibility.

These choices will affect everyone in our community for generations to come. Yet current decisions are handicapped by missing or inaccurate information that has artificially narrowed, fragmented, and distorted our choices.

Rushing into the proposed airside expansion seems needless and imprudent—risky for Aspen’s health, safety, and economy, and likely to yield an Airport not fit for its intended purpose.

Introducing: Aspen Fly Right

A group of concerned local citizens and experts deeply engaged with Airport issues has therefore formed an independent non-profit organization called Aspen Fly Right. We are solidly committed to science, education, and public benefit. We plan to offer our community clear, sound, actionable information about our Airport’s future, focusing on its proposed redesign to allow bigger planes.

Rapid aviation innovation now seems likely to solve our Airport’s airside problems before the proposed expansion based on outmoded thinking could even be built. Integrating new solutions not yet considered does show promise of solving most or all of the Airport’s airside issues simultaneously—even more effectively than current plans could, and at lower cost.

Get Involved

We seek to help inform the community and stimulate an independent, objective, accurate, inclusive, respectful, and constructive conversation. In the coming weeks, Aspen Fly Right will offer information here in a series of advertisements, elaborated and documented at our website <https://aspenflyright.org>, which describes our group and its goals.

Please contact us at info@aspenflyright.org, send media inquiries to press@aspenflyright.org, explore tax-deductible donations at support@aspenflyright.org, and send ideas, corrections, or confidential tips to tips@aspenflyright.org. We welcome your advice and support to help us provide the best possible public service. Thank you.

Initial endorsers of this effort include:

Ellen Anderson
Richard Arnold
Pat Boeshaar
James Brundige
Suzanne Caskey
Walter Chi
Wayne Ethridge
Joe Henry

Jay Hughes
Michael Kinsley
Amory and Judy Hill Lovins
John McBride
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*Exploring new solutions
for a safer, cleaner, quieter,
and better Aspen Airport.*