

**WHO IS ASKING  
FOR BIGGER  
PLANES?  
Q & A  
ABOUT THE  
ASPEN AIRPORT**



*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.

***Is the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) requiring Aspen Airport to accept bigger planes, raising the 95' wingspan limit to the standard 118'?***

No, that's entirely Pitkin County's choice. If the County doesn't demand bigger wingspans than 95', it can keep its 95' limit, and the existing airside built for those planes can remain as is.

***Do we need a bigger airport with larger separation between the runway and taxiway?***

Only if the County wants to let in bigger planes that need more space to pass each other on the ground—not if it doesn't. The County's new "Frequently Asked Questions" says a dozen times that raising the runway/taxiway separation from 320' to the standard 400' is an FAA safety requirement, but every time, it omits the punchline: "...if we want bigger planes." In 1999, the FAA found the 320' separation safe for 95' wingspans. It still is.

***Who is asking for bigger planes?***

The FAA likes national standards and dislikes local exceptions. But this exception of a smaller separation is justified by specific local constraints and costs—and bigger planes aren't even the FAA's initiative. The County came to the FAA to request them (says the FAA), and has sought them for over a decade. Even in 1995, a business-led campaign, invoking the same threats we hear today, wanted 737s. Voters refused by 3:2, and haven't been asked since.

***Without Aspen's upgrade for bigger, heavier planes, will the FAA stop its discretionary grants?***

That's what FAA director John Bauer told the Commissioners on April 11, 2023. He went so far as to say the terminal funding would depend on prior or concurrent airside upgrades—not doing the urgent terminal work first as Commissioners want. However, the FAA's \$2+-million-a-year entitlement grants would continue. So would other airport revenues tenfold larger.

***How important are FAA discretionary grants? Can the county maintain a modern airport without them?***

Of course we can: the County's online 2023 budget shows only \$6.8 million in *all* Federal grants, including entitlements, out of a \$26.9-million airport total. The Commissioners also have a crucial opportunity in the next few weeks to offset any lost discretionary grants by retaking control of the private-aviation Fixed Base Operation. That could keep \$4+ million of annual earnings reinvested in the airport rather than enriching an out-of-state owner.

***The simple answer is: The voters and residents of Pitkin County are not asking for bigger planes—and neither should the County.***



← Documented analyses supporting this ad (and eight more) are posted here.

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