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March 24, 2008

Mr. Kelvin Solco
Acting Director, AAS-1
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20591

Re: Proposed Closure of Tatum Airport, New Mexico

Dear Mr. Solco:

The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) represents more than 415,000 general aviation members nationwide – including 3,161 members in the state of New Mexico. On behalf of our membership, AOPA is committed to ensuring the future viability and development of general aviation airports and their facilities as part of the national transportation system.

AOPA recently learned that the New Mexico Department of Transportation Aviation Division is actively seeking Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) approval to close Tatum Airport (E07) located in Tatum, NM by March 31, 2008. This state owned and operated, public-use airport is included in the National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS) and is federally obligated through the Airport Improvement Program (AIP). Since Tatum is federally obligated through the AIP and its associated grant obligations as codified by the U.S. Congress in U.S. Code Title 49, Section 47107, AOPA requests that the FAA decline any officially submitted request from the New Mexico Department of Transportation to close the airport.

As the legal sponsor of the airport, the State of New Mexico is fully aware of the contractual obligations the state entered into with the FAA in exchange for receiving AIP funding for airport improvements. Paramount among them is the commitment by the state to continue to operate the airport as an airport for twenty years from the date of the last AIP grant received. In addition, the state should be reminded that they also agreed to operate and maintain the airport, “at all times in a safe and serviceable condition”. These provisions of the contract with the federal government provide for the protection of the public investment in the airport and an opportunity for the airport to contribute to the local economy.

Of great concern to AOPA is the fact that the proposed closure of Tatum Airport would be the second closure of a general aviation state owned and operated airport in the same county in less than a two-year timeframe. As you likely recall, the state closed the Eunice airport, located in Lea County in May of 2006. However, the closure notification and opportunity for comment did not occur until September of 2006 – after the airport had already been closed. It is our understanding that the Eunice Airport was closed as a

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result of inadequately maintained facilities. We further understand that the state of New Mexico is requesting to close Tatum Airport for the same reason. Given that the state of New Mexico currently serves as the sponsor of three general aviation facilities, AOPA is alarmed by what appears to be a pattern of inattention by the airport sponsor leading to closure requests.

Instead of approving a closure request, AOPA strongly encourages the FAA to demand the state provide a corrective action plan detailing how the sponsor will uphold it's obligation to ensure "the airport and facilities on or connected with the airport will be operated and maintained suitably..." at Tatum and other state owned airports.

We strongly encourage the FAA to hold the state of New Mexico to their obligations under the AIP and to deny the state's request to close the airport. If we can be of further assistance, please contact me at 301-695-2227.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Heidi J. Williams', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Heidi J. Williams
Senior Director
Airports