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Letters to the Editor
USA Today
7950 Jones Branch Road
McLean, VA 22108-0605

Via e-mail (letters@usatoday.com)

To the Editor:

USA Today, with its two articles of Dec. 14, continues to assail FAA funding for anything other than the biggest, busiest airports. In so doing, this newspaper ignores the needs of millions of Americans who do not live in big cities.

The premise of the articles fixates on a single data point that does not tell the complete story. And as any pilot can tell you, fixating leads to a loss of situational awareness. If you focus on one tree, you may miss the forest.

That fixation may be responsible for one airport terminal project approved by the FAA being cited as wasteful in the current economic circumstances. But the specific project was completed in 2003, fully five years before the current economic circumstances began.

The articles also fail to mention a major source of funding available to large airports that is not available at all the general aviation airports, and available in much smaller quantities at small commercial airports. Those are the passenger facility charges (PFCs) that airline passengers pay. PFCs go directly to the airport. The more airline passengers, the more money. And those airports use PFC funds to pay for the low priority projects for which smaller commercial and general aviation airports must rely on the FAA.

Priority and value are not necessarily the same thing. A project that receives a low priority at a national level may be of inestimable value to a local community. The FAA itself notes that its priority scores are only one criterion used to decide whether or not to approve funding. The agency also takes into account community needs and several other factors.

Suggesting that only the highest priority projects at the airports that serve the highest volume of travelers receive funding is to suggest that the federal government should only repair and improve interstate highways and ignore the rest of the federal highway system. That makes no sense. And neither would favoring only the biggest and busiest at the expense of the rest of the nation's air transportation system.

Sincerely,

Craig L. Fuller
AOPA President and CEO