



AIRCRAFT OWNERS AND PILOTS ASSOCIATION

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July 13, 2007

The Honorable Joe Hackney
Speaker, North Carolina House of Representatives
Legislative Building
Raleigh, NC 27601

Dear Mr. Speaker:

The closing of Horace Williams Airport has been a matter of some concern to the aviation community throughout North Carolina. For several years, the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA), on behalf of its more than 10,000 members in North Carolina, and 412,000 members nationwide have been working to protect this important airport.

Horace Williams Airport is a vital access point to North Carolina and the region's air transportation system. Properly supported, it would be an invaluable asset to the Chapel Hill economy and community. Nonetheless, the owner and operator of the airport, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has announced its intention to close the airport as part of developing a research park called Carolina North.

In addition to being an important part of North Carolina's transportation system, the airport plays a critical role in supporting the mission of the UNC's Area Health Education Centers (AHEC). Many physicians and local officials are concerned that the proposed closure of the airport will make the AHEC mission even more difficult.

The continuing operation of this airport should be viewed as an asset rather than as an obstacle to the proposed Carolina North development. It is important to note that the initial plans for Carolina North included the airport as part of the development. The original planners understood that the presence of an airport would enhance the attractiveness of Carolina North to corporate partners, as has been the experience at similar universities adjacent to a small airport.

Recently, the House Appropriations Subcommittees on Education and Health and Human Services held a joint hearing on the University's plans to close the airport. They heard compelling testimony on the importance of preserving the airport. Before UNC takes any irrevocable action in closing the airport, it is imperative that all of the consequences be carefully weighed. Although the General Assembly has twice voted to study the impact of closure, no study has been conducted, and this year's hearing was the first significant effort to understand these issues. Additionally, in 2004 the legislature required that a replacement airport within 10-15 minutes' drive of the UNC campus be open and operating before closing Horace Williams.

We encourage you to do all you can to ensure that these issues receive thoughtful consideration by legislators, and that in the meantime the University not be allowed to take any action that would precipitate the closure of Horace Williams. A practical solution can be found that protects this vital transportation facility, while allowing UNC to pursue its goals for Carolina North.

Very truly yours,

Gregory Pecoraro
Vice President, Regional Affairs