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July 29, 2010

Mr. Randall Curtis
Executive Director
Panama City-Bay County Airport
6300 West Bay Parkway
Panama City, FL 32409

Dear Mr. Curtis,

The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) represents the general aviation interests of 415,000 members, more than two-thirds of the nation's pilots, including nearly 32,000 members in the State of Florida. AOPA is committed to ensuring the future viability and economic development of general aviation airports and their facilities as a vital part of a state and national transportation system. The Association strives to ensure that aviation users have access to airports without unjust economic discrimination and on a fair and reasonable basis.

We are writing to express our serious concern related to the lack of facilities and services for general aviation operators at the new Northwest Florida – Panama City International Airport (ECP). AOPA had received numerous assurances from the Airport Authority that general aviation operators at the old airport Panama City – Bay County International (PFN) would be accommodated, and that simply has not occurred. General aviation operators are now trapped in a state of limbo – no services of any kind (fuel, maintenance or weather) at PFN and facilities that are behind schedule, plagued by multiple delays and unready for them at ECP. This is simply an inappropriate and unacceptable treatment of the segment of aviation that provided well over 80 percent of annual operations at PFN.

A number of the operators waiting for transition to the new airport must have access to their aircraft for business purposes which means that an all weather airport is necessary in order for them to operate. When the new airport became operational, all existing instrument approaches at PFN were cancelled.

Based on the current transition plan and subsequent opening of the Bay County airport, the based operators that remain at Panama City are left without instrument access to the airport. As a result of the loss of all-weather access, AOPA contacted the FAA in hopes of identifying an alternative means of arriving and departing Panama City during instrument meteorological conditions. While Tyndall approach control has agreed to provide radar services, the extended transition leaving operators without instrument approach procedures is less than ideal and can only be resolved fully with accommodations at the new Bay County Airport.

It is critical that the timely completion of general aviation facilities at the new airport become a priority. We urge you to expedite the completion of all facilities for general aviation operators and complete the transition plan.

Should you wish to discuss this matter further, please call my office at 301-695-2205.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bill Dunn", followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Bill Dunn
Vice President
Airport Advocacy

Cc: Dean Stringer, Manager
FAA Orlando Airport District Office