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September 28, 2010

Honorable Ron Blum
Mayor
City of St. Clair
1 Paul Parks Dr.
St. Clair, MO 63077

Dear Mayor Blum:

The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) represents the general aviation interests of 412,000 members, more than two-thirds of the nation's pilots, including over 7,130 members in the State of Missouri. 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.

We are writing again to reiterate the Association's strong opposition to ongoing discussions that the St. Clair Regional Airport be closed and the land redeveloped for alternate purposes. We have already conveyed our opposition to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), State of Missouri and the appropriate Members of Congress.

At the end of February 2009, I had the opportunity to visit St. Clair and the airport. I was shocked to see firsthand the obvious neglect and lack of maintenance of the airport infrastructure. There is no doubt that the city has not been a responsible steward of this public asset nor maintained and protected the investments made by the FAA nor the State of Missouri.

The city's continued efforts to seek closure of this transportation asset as reported in the September 24, 2010 edition "The St Clair Missourian" contradict the contract and federal grant assurances that the city entered into with the State and FAA when airport development funds were invested in the airport. Federal grant assurances are a matter of law and codified in Title 49 of the Code of Federal Regulations §47107. Attempting to change the rules of a contract with the FAA and State post-agreement simply isn't acceptable. The city is legally bound to maintain the airport and keep it in a safe and serviceable fashion for a period of 20 years from the last grant.

The news story quotes your new consultant, Ron Price of QED as stating that "The Federal Aviation Administration will be a formidable adverse force in this matter" He is correct and AOPA fully intends to ensure the FAA will do everything in its power to enforce federal grant assurances and the law.

It is important for you to know that the FAA has never approved a request for airport closure and release of grant assurances from the sponsor of an airport such as St. Clair. In fact, the City of Bakersfield attempted similar actions several years ago claiming the airport was not needed and a financial drain. The FAA rejected the request in the strongest terms - a copy of which is attached to this letter for your review.

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AOPA expects the city to honor its contractual obligation with the federal government. As an Association, we are prepared to take whatever action is necessary, to ensure the city does not close the airport and that St. Clair Regional Airport remains open and part of the national transportation system.

The city's position is especially disappointing because St Clair Regional Airport could be a tremendous economic development tool for the city; supporting the city's motto "Open for Business." It is our experience that many businesses make a conscious decision to locate facilities immediately adjacent to a public use airport. In the not too distant past, St. Clair Regional Airport was a thriving hub of business activity and revenue generation. With proper marketing, the airport could and should play an important and integral role in expanding business and tax revenues for the city. Much like the ramps to Interstate Highway 44, the airport is an on-ramp to the city. A different approach to managing the airport could mean jobs and increased economic activity for your community.

We urge you and city leaders to reevaluate your decision on closing the airport. There are already multiple abandoned, rundown business areas in the city that could be redeveloped instead of destroying an important public transportation asset.

Should you wish to discuss this issue with us, please contact my office at 301-695-2205.

Sincerely,



Bill Dunn
Vice President
Airport Advocacy

cc: Mr. James Arndt, City Administrator
Mr Nathan Tate, Alderman Ward 1
Ms. Connie Marrocco, Alderman Ward 1
Ms. Travis Dierker, Alderman Ward 2
Mr. Don Pierce, Alderman Ward 2

Mr. Joe Pestka
Missouri Department of Transportation

Mr. James Johnson, Manager
Airports Division – Central Region
Federal Aviation Administration