

Testimony of City of Abilene Municipal Airport
Senate Committee on Ways and Means
Proponent for SB 272 • February 14, 2024

Chairman Billinger and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Abilene Municipal Airport, K78, owned and operated by the City of Abilene, I thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of Senate Bill 272 regarding increasing the transfer from the state highway fund to the public use general aviation airport development fund.

The Abilene Airport, constructed in 1948, is a general aviation public-use facility that serves as an aviation gateway for Abilene to the State of Kansas and nationally. The airport is important in the local economy, primarily serving smaller businesses and recreational and personal flying. In addition, the airport serves a valuable role in the medical response time for patients in need of critical care by accommodating air ambulance services.

Our airport suffered a devastating loss when the city-owned 10-unit T-Hangar was blown down in a windstorm on May 4, 2020. The city has not had a public hangar available for visiting planes or rental to the local community since the destruction of the original hangar. The funds we received from the insurance claim were insufficient to build a complete replacement. We have been working closely with the FAA on priority projects necessary for compliance before they approve awarding funds for a Hangar design and rebuild. We are in the process of removing tree obstructions to allow night instrument approaches. These approaches were deemed "N/A" by the FAA in 2016. In 2019, obstruction evaluations were filed with the FAA as part of the Airport's Master Plan, completed in 2020 by Benesh. During the current obstruction removal project, it was identified that the FAA requires the displacement of the Runway 17 threshold by 186.19 feet because of the railroad that runs southwest of the airport property. The earliest we could apply for FAA funding to design a hangar is Fall 2025 and rebuild no earlier than Spring or Summer 2026.

Before the destruction of the city's conventional 10-unit hangar, we had up to 24 registered local-based planes with hangar leases from the city-owned hangar and property leases of privately constructed hangars. As of January 2024, we are down to 12 registered aircraft. To remain eligible for FAA funds, an airport must have a minimum of 10. Increasing the transfer of state highway funds to the airport development fund would have a positive direct impact on small local airports. The City of Abilene has repeatedly applied for funds to build a hangar. Most recently, we requested 50% matching funds through KDOT for a 4-6-unit hangar that we could build now and then expand in a couple of years with available FAA funds in the future. We are in danger of dropping below the required number of registered local-based aircraft, and we already have a waiting list of airplane owners wanting to lease a hangar once it has been built.

Thank you for your time and consideration of increasing the funds transferred to the public use general aviation airport development fund. Without the opportunity to apply for and use these funds, the development of local airports like our own would be extremely difficult to manage.

Sincerely,



Leann Johnson, Finance Director
City of Abilene, Kansas