



Noise study to protect future of airport

By NEIL YOUNG/The Daily News

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BULLHEAD CITY — Protecting Laughlin/Bullhead International Airport from encroaching development is the purpose behind a \$313,500, 18-month-long, noise study now under way. Residential development too close to the airport could threaten its very existence, said David Gaines, airport director. "It could eventually shut down an airport. It happens all the time around the country."

Gaines said, "The whole idea is to identify the areas that are severely impacted by aircraft noise and ensure that incompatible development does not occur near the airport. In areas where the noise impact may be less severe, you can do different kinds of development and require insulation and double pane windows and landscaping and things that can be done to mitigate some of the impact of the noise."

The idea is to keep residential construction from getting too close to the airport, and reserve those areas for industrial or commercial use. "The FAA encourages noise studies to develop local ordinances to protect the airport so you don't have to deal with some of these issues in the future," Gaines said.

Other projects in various stages at the airport include:

A new baggage claim facility is almost complete. The two-year project came in at just under \$2 million, Gaines said.

A five-year long environmental assessment was completed nearly a year ago for a runway extension project. A Finding of No Significant Impact has been determined by the FAA. The runway will be extended 1,000 feet to the south, for a total of 8,500 feet.

"Typically, an 8,000-foot runway is what you need to handle most commercial aircraft, so if we have 8,500 that gives us a little bit of cushion there," Gaines said. The first phase of extension design is budgeted for next year. Site preparation would take place in 2013, and then the runway and a parallel taxiway would be constructed in 2014.

Before construction can proceed for a new airport firefighting facility, some issues must be resolved with the Black Mesa pipeline, which would pass under the fire station. The pipeline, owned by ONEOK Partners, fed coal slurry to the now-defunct Mohave Generating Station power plant in Laughlin. Airport officials want the pipe removed from under their property, except for the section that passes under the runway. "We don't want them to dig that up, obviously," Gaines said. In that case, both ends could be capped after the pipe is filled with concrete slurry, he said.

Gaines hopes to start a \$2 million project within the next six months to build a small cargo building. It would house Federal Express, and also serve as a warehouse facility for the airlines' parts and maintenance supplies.

Projects are covered mostly by grants, which are paid for by proceeds from aviation taxes on tickets, fuel, and air freight. The airport is responsible for five percent of a project's cost, with the state normally picking up half of that five percent.

There's a possibility an unidentified "big box" store may build on airport property along Highway 95. Businesses such as Sam's Club, Home Depot and IHOP have long term leases with the airport.

Environmental remediation on two parcels of airport property is nearing an end. The land was polluted by underground tanks from a gas station that occupied the site several years ago.

The airport is putting the finishing touches on a back-up agreement between its firefighters and the Bullhead City Fire Department.

Three airport firefighters are certified as EMTs, with the remaining three ready to take their EMT test.

The military continues to use the airport for training exercises.

The airport will once again oversee the Tri-state's Toys for Tots campaign, which is now under way. The program served 160 children last year. Businesses wishing to be designated as toy collection points are asked to call 928-754-2134.