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Emergency plane landing has residents worried about proposed runway expansion at Ann Arbor Airport

by Tracy Davis | The Ann Arbor News

Tuesday June 16, 2009, 7:39 PM



Lon Horwedel | The Ann Arbor News

A small plane made an emergency landing in the Stonebridge subdivision, where residents are concerned about a proposed runway expansion.

An emergency landing of a single-engine plane in a subdivision near the Ann Arbor Airport Tuesday has some neighbors even more worried about a proposed runway expansion.

Residents say they're concerned extending the runway southwest 950 feet toward the Stonebridge subdivision could result in disaster if a plane fails on takeoff.

The plane involved in Tuesday's incident was landing, not taking off, when the engine lost power. The pilot was able to put the plane down on the Stonebridge Golf Course without injury.

But residents say it underscores the proximity of a relatively dense subdivision to the airport, which gets about 75,000 take-offs and landings annually. They worry an expansion would bring the possibility of incidents like Tuesday's closer, potentially with larger planes.

"The objections to the expansion are that the expanded runway will bring in larger, heavier aircraft that will carry larger payloads and present safety

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risks to people who surround the airport," said Stonebridge resident Andy McGill.

If a plane takes off over the neighborhood and has engine trouble, a larger aircraft that's less maneuverable could be more likely to crash into a home, he said.

Officials with the city's airport advisory committee say it's not clear lengthening the runway would permit bigger planes. And the runway used for takeoffs toward the southwest - and the Stonebridge subdivision - will only be lengthened by 150 feet.

The parallel runway that will be used for takeoffs to the northeast would extend a full 950 feet closer, but those planes would be heading away from the subdivision.

Earlier this year, the city initiated an environmental assessment study to look at potential impacts of an expansion such as noise, air and water quality, as well as historical and cultural resources, social and socioeconomic factors. The assessment is expected to be completed in the fall.

The expansion, which is called for in the airport's master plan, is mainly to address several safety issues, said Mark Perry, chair of the airport advisory committee.

One is a visibility issue from the tower to the runway. Bumping the runway back 150 feet from State Street will resolve that and help raise the altitude at which planes must cross over State Street, Perry said. And by extending the landing strip an additional 800 feet to the southwest, it will mean more room to prevent run-offs.

The airport is used for flying lessons for many inexperienced pilots; 11 overruns have occurred in the past decade, far more than other airports of comparable size in Michigan, Perry said. The current runway length is 3,500 feet.

"I can't tell you what average runway length is, but I can tell you that Ann Arbor ranks the seventh of ninth busiest (in Michigan) and you look at runway length and Ann Arbor is the absolute shortest," Perry said. "The next shortest of towered runways is 5,500. Is the Ann Arbor Airport safe? Absolutely. All we're trying to do is make it more safe."

Karen Healy, another Stonebridge resident, said neighbors also are concerned more potential traffic and fuel around the site could impact local ponds and the environment.

But most area residents live in Pittsfield Township and have no say on the decision since runway changes must be approved by Ann Arbor's City Council.

"We just all feel a little bit helpless," she said.

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COMMENTS (23)

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Posted by **psstcsst** on 06/16/09 at 8:03PM

Too darn bad to the Stonebridge residents. No reason to complain you all knew the airport was around way before your little golf community existed. airports are commerce and economy, not no little overpriced golf course community with its stuck up residents.

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Posted by **1134me** on 06/16/09 at 9:19PM

This airport has nothing to do with "business and economy". In fact, the operations are way down in this year compared to last year, and each student "touch and go" practice is counted as two operations. City Council passed a resolution to restrict the weight of planes to 12,000, but it is the FAA that determines the weight, and planes weighing 20,000 pounds land there right now. Thank heaven this plane was just a little one, and that there was a golf course nearby!

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If the City Council votes to lengthen the runway, the FAA pays for it, but then the City must keep the airport in operation for 20 years whether it makes money, breaks even, or loses money. And if it loses money, that loss will come out of the General Fund, the pockets of Ann Arbor taxpayers.



Did you know that GM and Chrysler have grounded their executive aircraft? Many other businesses have also done so.

The Ann Arbor Airport is quite fine as it is, and we should keep it that way.

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Posted by **harryphysio** on 06/16/09 at 9:21PM

It looks like Mike Perry, on behalf of the airport, is changing his story yet again! And doing his very best to deceive Ann Arbor residents and council members.

Mark Perry states that "the runway used for takeoffs toward the southwest - and the Stonebridge subdivision - will only be lengthened by 150 feet. The parallel runway that will be used for takeoffs to the northeast would extend a full 950 feet closer, but those planes would be heading away from the subdivision"

It is important to be aware that this is ONE and the SAME runway, NOT 2 separate runways. This runway will allow take offs and landings both to the southwest (towards the subdivision) and to the northeast - toward Ann Arbor schools and residents. This proposed single runway extension will bring planes 950 feet closer to this densely populated residential area.

That is 950 feet closer to a potential disaster for Stonebridge.

And as for these multiple overruns Mark Perry talks about - interestingly the majority of these were OFF THE SIDE of the runway and would not have been prevented by even a 1000 feet runway extension.

It is time to stop the "spin" Mr Perry and start taking public safety seriously.

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Posted by **stonepoliska** on 06/16/09 at 10:54PM

Gosh psstcsst, if the residents of Georgetown were to complain if the highway were to be expanded would you turn a blind eye? Hey they knew the highway was there. When the residents around the Big House complained about the construction were they just sissies? Hey they have the best parking spaces at football season. This is an issue of safety for hundreds of people, old and young who live near the airport. I hate to break it to you but it isn't just high dollar homes, it is businesses and schools (Ann Arbor Learning Community is at Elsworth and State and Bryant Elementary is in the flight pattern) and possibly someone you know. If you live in a home on a road that is 25 miles per hour and the speed limit is increased to 50 mph, wouldn't you complain? Quit saying...they should have known...the airport was always there...this situation is like the 25mph road and they want to increase the speed to 50mph. Please, could you give me the data for the incredible economic impact the A2 airport has on A2? Do you think it could ever really compete with Willow Run or Detroit metro? Would you really want it to? If you are going to be annoyed that the residents of one of the subdivisions effected by the suggested expansion are affluent....who do you think can afford to be a weekend pilot? So take your economic bias out of this equation and think about the safety of all individuals who find themselves near the A2 airport.

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Posted by **pinewoodsguy** on 06/16/09 at 11:11PM

If it were a drivable crashed car, the Pittsfield Public SAFETY Dept would have called a tow truck. But with an aircraft, they figure it is O.K. to let the guy drive down a public road, propelled by his propeller.

Did the pilot get a ticket? He should have. If not, why not? Don't those Pittsfield cops know all the twp ordinances. They'll drop their pen on the ticket book for any teenage driver; why not this failed flyboy? Inquiring minds should like to ken.

Just wondering. Dez yins hooners agree wid me? Well, let me tell you: 1. Stonebridge property values are gonna go D-O-W-N!!! Who wants to buy a house in the glide path of teenboy student pilots? 2. Pittsfield Twp has NO

say! The City of Ann Arbor OWNS the airport. Yins Pittsfield hooners, ya jist hunker doon and pray!

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Posted by **MikeDinA2** on [06/16/09 at 11:14PM](#)

Safety? Really? This freak incident doesn't change the fact that the number of homes hit by small planes every year is infinitesimally small. Even homes near airports have less chance of being hit by a plane than of getting struck by lightning. This is about people not wanting to hear the planes because it's a nuisance, so let's be honest.

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Posted by **antihypo** on [06/16/09 at 11:37PM](#)

Pinewoodsguy.

>>If it were a drivable crashed car, the Pittsfield Public SAFETY Dept would have called a tow truck. But with an aircraft, they figure it is O.K. to let the guy drive down a public road, propelled by his propeller.

Frankly I am AMAZED, they let the aircraft just taxi back to the airport !

Does the FAA have no accident investigation protocol ? Is this their normal M.O ?

One more item for Pittsfield residents to consider: It is YOU who pay for the POLICE and FIRE trucks responding to ARB airport emergencies !

Yes, while the airport is "owned" by AA, they have NO CRASH and FIRE RESCUE TEAMS. As an added insult to injury YOU PAY, with your tax dollars for all these mishaps.

It is time Pittsfield take a strong stance and DELIVER THE BILL TO AA Council folks.

Maybe this will help the AA Council understand the liability they will OWN, if / when this airport is expanded.

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Posted by **antihypo** on [06/16/09 at 11:47PM](#)

MikeDin.

"Freak incident" ?

Really ?

Would you like a list of light twin crashes around airports ?

How about the 6 fatalities at ARB ? ALL of which had NOTHING to do with runway length !

Remember:

short runway is the ONLY natural 'filter' for bigger disasters

larger runway WILL allow HEAVIER aircraft !

The heavier the aircraft, the faster it has to fly to remain airborne. The same applies during an emergency. It will not be as pretty as this cute taildragger taxiing back to the airport...

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Posted by **sellers** on [06/17/09 at 8:28AM](#)

I agree psstcsst , the airport was there and has been one of the busier airports of it's size for many years. I feel for the residents, but when you purchase a house, you must be aware of the surroundings. Highways, rail, airports, golf, rivers, etc.

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Posted by **necco1** on [06/17/09 at 8:31AM](#)

Hey, without a longer runway, where will the really important people, like the Tom Monaghan's who wanted it expanded years ago, go to fly their personal jets? That is what this is all about.

I mean, should we really make them drive all the way to Willow Run like they do now? It must be such an inconvenience to them. Given that they are such really important people, after all...

And, there is already a road in front of my house. I shouldn't have any grounds to complain later when someone wants to turn it into a 6-lane expressway, right? After all, I did move into my house with the knowledge that a road was there already. Same argument for a larger airport? Please.

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Posted by **CVFlyer** on [06/17/09 at 8:42AM](#)

If you live near the airport and don't feel safe, there is a perfect and inexpensive answer! **Move!**

An accident is just that, an unintentional event. To complain about this is so asinine, people should be cheering the pilots skill. The residents of the area face far greater danger of injury or death in their bathroom then they do from the planes flying overhead! **So the local authorities should seek to eliminate those bathrooms and the dangers they represent to the community!**

Come on people, grow up, the sky isn't falling.

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Posted by **necco1** on [06/17/09 at 8:52AM](#)

There we go again, another message brought to you by your friendly airport expansion supporter :-)

I agree, CVFlyer. Your logic is perfectly clear. Roads are inherently dangerous and result in deaths every day. All people who have a road in front of their house should move immediately and never, ever, complain if that road is widened, expanded, or if the speed limit is doubled. After all, you knew there was a road there when you bought the house, so just keep quiet! Same logic for the airport, right? When the next step of allowing Delta commercial flights in the AA airport is made, all residents should just MOVE!

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Posted by **a2huron** on [06/17/09 at 9:05AM](#)

Necco1 - your analogy is a hoot! LMAO! It also happens to be right on point and true.

Sounds like there are some very "special" interests involved who want this airport expanded - most of which probably have their own personal aircraft they want to relocate from elsewhere. Funny how they take the stance of criticising some residents in a subdivision living nearby. Bet those special folks would be cryin' murder if the airport was near their mansions up in good ol' northern Ann Arbor.

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Posted by **ARBisSAFE** on [06/17/09 at 9:06AM](#)

Move eh ?!

That is exactly what you will get with an expanded airport, a decline to the surrounding communities which will be reflected in a decline in school funding and the general economy.

All this sacrifice so few rich fat cats can fly their private / corporate jet from their office door to their home in Florida for the weekend ?!...

If the choice is to make the fat-cat drive to Willow Run (A VERY safe airport) and have AA and the surrounding communities, maintain the quality of life...It's a no brainer.

make them drive and enjoy a MUCH SAFER Airport !

No one wants to close ARB. Let's just keep it the way it is and not try and make it what it was never meant to be. Yet if you keep irritating the surrounding communities enough, you may eventually get more than what you have bargained for.

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Posted by **genericreg** on [06/17/09 at 9:45AM](#)

Wow, now I see why this state is, has been, and will be for a long time the worst economy in the country. This is really the most important thing to whine about? The kinds of statements that associate an injury-free, minimally-damaging (poor golf grass!) accident with a jet plane crashing into an elementary school, or whatever you fear-mongering conservative white people are imagining, is silly. Accidents happen. Cars kill more people than anything - we don't stop building roads. We haven't stopped letting Hostess sell Twinkies.

Give me a break. Think about all the poor people who want to rob you, or the mentally ill people who can't afford treatment and will end up beating up your daughter or something. Think about the tragedy that is the state of pop music today. And next time you move, don't move to Seattle and tell the government to do something about all the clouds.

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Posted by **glimmertwin** on [06/17/09 at 9:56AM](#)

Maybe someone should request some stimulus money so a study can be done for road widening. Ellsworth Road should be widened in case a larger aircraft misses and it needs to taxi back to the airport.

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Posted by **ANNARBORAL** on [06/17/09 at 9:57AM](#)

There are two tangible issues. First, who benefits from the airport? I believe the correct answer is a small elite bunch of pilots and local businesses that are too lazy to drive to Willow Run. The bottom line is that there is almost no economic benefit to the local airport. Second, who is deciding the issue? The City of Ann Arbor owns the airport property. However, it is totally surrounded by Pittsfield Township. So the people impacted have no real say in the outcome.

CONCLUSION: Close the Pittsfield Airport because it doesn't provide much value to the community. Create a wonderful recreation area that is green and a joy for everyone.

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Posted by **1134me** on [06/17/09 at 10:00AM](#)

I agree with the previous writer - there are far more important things to spend our tax money on than having the FAA (our federal taxes) pay to expand our airport. Keep it as it is, and then address the REAL problems facing this country and community.

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Posted by **Ihill789** on [06/17/09 at 10:03AM](#)

from genericreg...."whatever you fear-mongering conservative white people are imagining"

Really? From the tone of that post and some others above, I can't help but wonder if pure jealousy is the motivation for many posters who agree with the airport expansion. This has nothing to do with the color of anyone's skin or with their political beliefs (or, for that matter, the tragedy of pop music today). Planes can crash on liberal black homes too.

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Posted by **FLTInstruct** on [06/17/09 at 10:41AM](#)

Perspective folks ! Focus please.

ONE Delta or Kallita 747 bring more revenue to the area than ARB will in decades.

It's that simple.

As an example, while a Delta flight makes it's way from the Orient with hundreds of people and thousands of lbs of cargo, few Cessna 150s flying around ARB punching holes in the sky... Nothing wrong with that ! During this process however, while the Delta 747 makes one takeoff and a landing, the ARB fliers, made tens of such events.

Obviously, this results the mother of all ignorant statements you hear from ARB folks in regards to how "busy" ARB is.

Yes, ARB is "busy", but when it comes to **SUBSTANCE, there isn't much there.**

Money should be spent on the Willow Run- Detroit corridor, NOT in eroding quality of life at AA and surrounding areas for no good reason.

let's get things in perspective.

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Posted by **metzley** on [06/17/09 at 11:31AM](#)

With the bigger airport, think they will bring back the fireworks. :-) Man I miss those.

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Posted by **salinedion** on [06/17/09 at 4:29PM](#)

The statements from the article"... it's not clear lengthening the runway would permit bigger planes. And the runway used for takeoffs toward the southwest - and the Stonebridge subdivision - will only be lengthened by 150 feet.

The parallel runway that will be used for takeoffs to the northeast would extend a full 950 feet closer, but those planes would be heading away from the subdivision."...are so ignorant of the facts and full of spin that I have to think this AA News reporter was incompetent...or else the airport advisory committee and the airport manager are liars. The airport has no authority to limit which direction legally filed planes depart.

Georgetown residents are the people who will be affected and placed in the most danger by this expansion because while the Stonebridge Golf course to the SW has some open space for an emergency landing, there is emergency landing site in the the city!! An engine loss of power NE of the airport means a crash into Georgetown houses.

signed ... an airline pilot opposed to the expansion

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Posted by **FLTInstruct** on [06/18/09 at 1:16AM](#)

Airline Pilot.

Well said ! And thanks for your input.

I am not sure what it will take for the AA Council to finally realize they are being told half truths and innuendos by the Airport Advisory Cmte . Let's hope it will not be another, more serious accident.

Ref:

>>Georgetown residents are the people who will be affected and placed in the most danger by this expansion because while the Stonebridge Golf course to the SW has some open space for an emergency landing, there is emergency

landing site in the the city!! An engine loss of power NE of the airport means a crash into Georgetown houses.

signed ... an airline pilot opposed to the expansion

While it is obvious Georgetown residents should WAKE UP, it is also clear message for AA and surrounding communities to **ONCE and FOR ALL put an end to being bullied by a SMALL group of self interest people.**

Send a clear message to the AA Council people that WE LIVE HERE BECAUSE WE ENJOY QUALITY OF LIFE. **LONGER RUNWAY = REDUCED QUALITY OF LIFE AND REDUCED SAFETY .**

Only an ignorant fool who knows nothing about flying, can claim that a longer runway is needed for "SAFETY".

The "safety" argument and the nonsense published about "parallel runway", is a CLEAR display of how the "Airport Advisory Cmte" **SPIN**and operate .They have FOOLED the AA Mayor and council and by doing so, will place entire communities AT RISK !

A note to the AA Council and Mayor:

.1 THERE IS NO PARALLEL Runway ! It is the SAME SLAB OF CONCRETE.

De Spin ALERT follows:

Pay attention: An aircraft takes off INTO the wind. At ARB,90% of the time, the runway WILL BE to the southwest !!! It is the SAME runway, but it will now be LONGER .

2. Contrary to what you are told by your own AAC: **LONGER RUNWAY WILL ALLOW AIRCRAFT TO CARRY MORE WEIGHT !** This is an undeniable fact of life resulting from basic laws of physics and aerodynamics.
(After all, this is EXACTLY the intent of this project for the benefit of select few "special" private/corporate operators).

3. Heavier aircraft WILL CAUSE MORE DAMAGE in the event of an emergency.

4. Airport "category" DOES NOT MATTER. There is plenty of room for increased WEIGHT even under the EXISTING category.

5.*****The ONLY way to REDUCE RISK and INCREASE SAFETY to more citizens, is to maintain the present runway *****

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