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FEEDER AIR ROUTES

By

B. E. COLE*

Before I read my prepared speech, I would like to read President Morris' comments on feeder service which he did not give us at the luncheon yesterday.

"This Association has gone on record in favor of the development and establishment of so-called "feeder" airlines, thus recognizing the fact that the present established air routes directly serve only a little over one-quarter of the nation's population (often with unsatisfactory and infrequent schedules), and that of the 4,000 cities in the United States with over 5,000 inhabitants, there are only 210 cities, or about five per cent, on the airlines.

"Concentrated effort toward accomplishment of the purposes of this resolution was withheld, pending the Civil Aeronautics Authority's decision on the application of Airline Feeder System, Inc., for a certificate of convenience and necessity. The decision was made on June 9, 1939, and the request for the certificate was denied.

"At first blush, this seemed a very poor commentary on the attitude of the Civil Aeronautics Authority toward feeder developments. Here was a small line that had struggled to get a footing under the old Bureau of Air Commerce—it had operated without benefit of air mail and had been required to run a scheduled service at a heavy financial loss in order to be qualified to file an application under the so-called "Grandfather Clause." After all this, the application to be allowed to continue operations had been rejected on grounds that the line had not rendered adequate and efficient service, having carried relatively few passengers during its existence, having run only one scheduled trip per week during the latter part of its life in accordance with permission granted by the Civil Aeronautics Authority and having been forced into bankruptcy.

"This decision might seem to promise a black future for the development of supplementary air transportation services; but careful study does not justify this conclusion, at least to date, because it must be realized that Airline Feeder's application could not be decided on the general ground of a need for the service. It had to

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be decided on the specific considerations required under the grandfather clause; namely, (1) that the airline had been "an air carrier, continuously operating as such" from May 14, 1938; and (2) that the service rendered for such period had been *efficient and adequate*. The admitted facts in the case could not support these latter requirements, and the application therefore had to be rejected.

"It is important to realize, however, that this does not, of itself, indicate the Authority's position as regards feeder services. The decision that will demonstrate whether or not the present Act, and the present administration of it, will permit the expansion of transport services by means of feeder lines, is rolling through the mill-wheels at this moment, dealing with the application of this same company (Airline Feeder System) to establish a *new* feeder service.

"It is generally admitted that the present Civil Aeronautics Act encourages the creation of such services and that it is adequate as it now stands. The point that still remains to be demonstrated is whether or not the *administration* of the Act will be such as to permit this most necessary expansion. The Authority's action on the application now pending will furnish the answer.

"It may appear from the foregoing that too much emphasis has been laid on federal matters. However, state problems in aviation are so closely interwoven with the problems, decisions and acts of the federal government that we must at no time fail to recognize the actual or potential influence of the national aviation program on us. Our duties in the states begin where the federal jurisdiction ends, whether that ending be caused by constitutional limitations or by the limitations of personnel and appropriations. It is for this reason that the foregoing remarks on federal aspects have required substantial treatment."

To this, I add the following comments:

When I received your President's invitation to speak on the subject of feeder routes, I worked up a comprehensive talk on them which bristled with statistics, and I hope conclusively proved that the routes were practical and necessary. You won't have to listen to this, as I threw it out when I learned that you have already gone on record as being in favor of feeder routes.

A detailed review on what feeder lines ought to be, where they should go, what equipment should be used and how they should be operated, will not do much toward getting some self-sustaining lines going. When we have solved that question, we can go into these details and consider who is to run these routes and what deviations from primary airline practice should be permitted or required.

All I am going to say about feeder air routes is just enough to define my interpretation of feeder service. The rest of my time will be spent on what I think the members of this Association can do to carry out their resolution to foster it.

As I understand the term, there have been no true feeder routes yet. A few runs in the present primary system should perhaps be feeder routes, but they are being operated as primary lines under primary airline regulation. These have been short lines carrying passengers without mail, there are others carrying mail without passengers, but there has not been a feeder line using equipment suited to small airports, operating under regulations adapted to its class of service and carrying mail, passengers, and express.

I believe that there is a basic difference between primary and feeder service which goes deeper than this commonly accepted definition. The primary airline's business is built around the service it provides within its own routes, and particularly between the large cities thereon. Connections with other airlines and services to its own intermediate stations are and always will be secondary considerations.

On the other hand, the feeder will get but a small percentage of its business from travel wholly within its own route; therefore, connections are the basis of feeder routes and of the schedules which will be established on them.

Service for intermediate stations, rather than between termini is the first consideration, and this fact makes the problem of proper route location extremely important. This was very simple with the primary routes, since they were instituted to link our larger cities, and intermediate stops were made at points which happened to lie on the route. Service into these intermediate points has been secondary to that between the large cities.

Building a service for the intermediate station must be planned the other way around. First you consider that station; second you decide to what large cities and junction points it should be linked. Your feeder route isn't planned to serve large cities—that is the job for the primary routes. What the feeder must do is give the smaller cities fast transportation to every point in the country. That means a lot more than fast airplanes. It means convenient schedules and good connections with as many other lines as possible.

The operator of such a route can't figure on much business between his own stations, for the automobile will make better door to door time on distances of around one hundred miles, in nearly every case. But if his route is intelligently laid out, it will have an outlet at both ends and possibly at other points along the line so

that at each station he will have a balance of outgoing and incoming traffic.

With these thoughts in mind, a tentative national route system was laid out some time ago. The 906 additional airway stations on it will serve 70,000,000 additional people. Less than 45,000,000 have air service in this country today.

You may have noted that I said fast transportation, not air service. Not all of these 70,000,000 live in the towns at which the airway stations are proposed, but all of them do live within an hour's drive of them. Bus routes extending from airway stations to points within this one hour radius will provide just as direct an air service as that of Chicago or St. Louis, and such surface transportation should be considered a part of any feeder service. The average at each of the projected airway stations, including those within the one hour driving radius, is 77,000 persons. This does not include any large cities now having air service.

I have split up this tentative feeder system into routes, and it should be clearly understood that there is a difference between an air route and an airline. The length of a route is the distance an airplane can cover, make its connections, and give good service to its intermediate stations. It may be economical for one feeder line to operate several feeder routes, but the minute that line starts basing its schedules on through service, it encroaches on the primary field. If there is need for through service, by all means start a primary route for it, but don't try to combine the two types, for if you do it's back to the dog house for the intermediate towns.

Feeder routes should be as long as you can make them; short lines cannot be self sustaining unless there is demand enough to support a number of trips each day. An excellent instance is the Post Office proposal for air mail between Bismarck and Minot, North Dakota, a distance of 106 miles, made some two years ago. No one has taken it up yet. You can't provide first class equipment and operate it properly on an hour and a half of flying a day. It would be a losing proposition even if you received a dollar a mile for the mail.

Comprehensive advance planning will eliminate such short tag end routes. Without it there will be a lot left over which no one wants to operate and on which it would be impossible to give good service if they were tacked on to other lines.

I think we must accept the premise that at the start feeder routes will be daylight operated in contact weather.

I do not subscribe to Mr. Hester's statements in his "Progress Valley" speech at Kansas City last fall. His contention seemed to

be that if feeder routes were to have any practical value they would have to be operated at night, and that if they were to be so operated, there would have to be radio ranges and lighted airways. If night flying were unrestricted, over eighty per cent of all feeder route flying would be by day if the feeder is going to provide the connecting service that its very name implies.

Let's say we have one running northwest from here (New Orleans) and that Progress Valley is on it. If we are going to provide

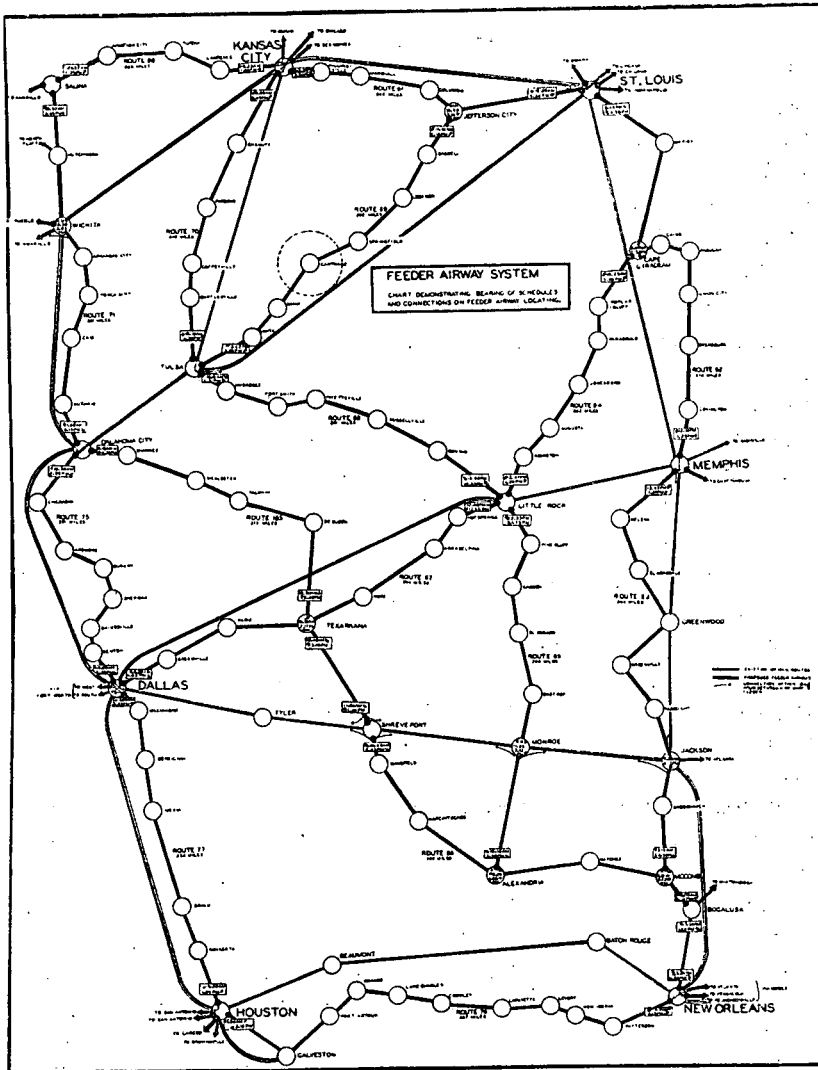


Figure 1

any connecting service at all, we can't leave here until the New York and Chicago planes are in, and we must get back before they leave that evening. In summer, that means no night flying; in winter, we can avoid it by stepping up our afternoon schedule about an hour.

These are not mythical instances. I have a chart here (Figure 1) with possible routes in this area, and the time schedules on this chart are what can be done with planes now available.

Intentional instrument flying as practiced today is not practical for feeder routes. Ranges in existence are adequate for emergency conditions, and in nearly every case will be found at the termini of any properly located route. If ranges were provided, the time required for an instrument approach to each station would make the terminus to terminus speed about equal to that of an ox cart at a slow walk. Probably it won't be many years before we have a blind landing system which will make such landings as simple as driving down a concrete road in broad daylight, but until then, added ranges would not be an asset to an average feeder route.

There has been much discussion on equipment. I believe planes of from four to eight passenger capacity will be preferable to larger types for some time to come. Their higher pound-mile cost will be off-set by partial load savings and the undisputed value of frequent service. Two or three trips a day with a small plane can be made at about the same cost as one trip with planes of from fourteen to twenty-eight passenger capacity.

Whatever the design or size, I am convinced of one thing: that is that any feeder plane should comfortably carry full loads out of any Class 2 airport under any wind or temperature conditions, and in emergency should take this load out of any Class 1 field. It should not require a prima donna for a pilot. It should be free from gadgets requiring a co-pilot. Several makes of twin-motored planes are, or shortly will be, on the market which will meet these specifications and cruise at 160 miles per hour or better. Such planes could be efficiently operated and meet expenses and existing air express rates. On our tentative system, mail would cost \$7.53 per stop; and if for each station one person out of every 1226 received and sent a letter, the mail revenue would equal this sum. I differ with the optimists who think that feeder routes are going to generate this amount of mail. Primary lines are just about to a point where gross air mail revenue almost equals the amount paid them for hauling it, after twelve years of development. It will take the feeder just as long, and perhaps longer; some of them may never earn all they are paid. That is subsidy, and feeder lines will need it. You're not kidding any one

who has had the slightest insight into air mail volume when you try to prove they won't.

Those who regard this as just another raid on the treasury should read a little history. Every improvement in scheduled transportation this country has ever had has been made possible by government support, usually through the post office department. Railroad and steamship service got their start this way. A hundred years ago railroads were being pushed out into the plains when there wasn't an inhabitant to five miles of track. No formulae based on population, postal receipts, trading centers and so forth justified these extensions. Foresight alone warranted the support our government gave them.

Our national development is unprecedented in the world's history, not only because we are rich in natural resources and because we have a democratic form of government, but more than any one thing we have become a great nation because our government, up to now, has always supported extension of scheduled transportation, not just in our lush and easy years, but in the hardest times.

One of the most critical periods in the history of our nation's finances occurred just a hundred years ago when there was a panic that makes our depression look like a pink tea. Banks were failing right and left, unsuccessful cure-alls were being tried in our Treasury Department, desperate measures were being taken to safeguard private capital. Certainly, if there was ever a time to question the propriety of subsidy, that was the moment for it.

Let's see what Congress did. In 1839 they authorized the Postmaster General to pay "up to \$300 a mile for transporting railway mail," and in 1840 he reported to Congress that he had paid "amounts varying from twenty-five per cent to three hundred per cent above that which had been paid for stagecoach service over the same routes." That is what our forefathers did to double the speed of transportation in the midst of one of the most trying times in our financial history.

One hundred years later we find ourselves with a new transportation medium, one which will treble the speed of existing service, and, as has always been the case, this new service needs aid to get it on its feet. Private capital alone can't undertake it. This time we don't ask for many dollars a mile; we ask for a few cents. In the light of history, denial of this aid is an admission that we are done with progress, and I don't think that Congress wants to go on record to that effect.

As many of you know, feeder routes can best be operated with the present fixed base operator as a nucleus, supervised by central management and provided with planes and major servicing. I don't

believe that this is the time to discuss that plan, nor is it the time to discuss whether existing airlines or new ones should operate the lines on these feeder routes. Since they will be supported by public money, the people who use these lines should have the say about what routes are to be established and what kind of service they want over them. No star chamber proceedings behind closed doors will insure either the best or most efficient service, no matter how conscientiously they are conducted. It can only be done by finding out what the public needs and wants and then coordinate that demand.

No group of men in the United States is better fitted to bring about this coordination than the group comprising the National Association of State Aviation officials. You men know the states in which you live. You know the people in them. You know where air service is most needed in your respective states and you have aviation knowledge.

While most of the routes will perhaps be interstate, the first thing needed is a list of the points in each state which should have air service, where airports should be and what surface connections are needed from each station to adjacent towns; also the junction points which each air station community would like to have on its route.

This data can be collected by state officials and from it a coordinating bureau can map interstate routes. Naturally, there must be compromises, but I think you will be agreeably surprised at how many places will get exactly what they want in the way of air service. Probably many of you could give this data right now. Intensive work could have it all in hand within a few weeks.

Meanwhile, a bill should be prepared for presentation to Congress, carrying an appropriation for air mail and providing for the establishment of experimental feeder routes. In it there should be suitable provisions to insure getting the kind of service your citizens want and to insure fair and impartial consideration of methods for providing that service. It should avoid provisions which might benefit one state more than another. The patronage system will probably still be doing business when our unified demands have brought concrete results. Once the ball gets rolling, all states can expect to have service within a few years, and premature attempts to influence route location will only generate needless opposition elsewhere.

Some will question why I should recommend a bill when there is now a bureaucratic set-up which can bring all this about without one. Among the many reasons I have for this, perhaps the most important is the record of what has been done to date and how it was

accomplished. The only air mail pay I know of outside of that paid to primary lines was obtained by a bill introduced in Congress at the instigation of Dr. Lytle Adams, which carried an appropriation and specified certain operating requirements. You may or may not like his system of picking up mail, but that is beside the point. The point is that by specifically providing in a bill just what was to be done, money was appropriated to support a type of air service and that service is operating now.

You all know the history of feeder mail to date, how we have had many demonstrations at private expense, how literally hundreds of towns and cities have individually presented their case for air service to either the postal or aeronautic departments of our government. You all know that nothing has been done. So far as I know, nothing is contemplated in the near future.

As your President pointed out very ably yesterday, "A Federal Agency can only recommend—Congress is the voice of the people." Without a bill expressing this voice before the body can act on it, feeder route development apparently depends on what the boys in the back room decide to do about it when they find time to consider the question.

We have had good suggestions before other conventions with reference to feeder routes. They have come to nothing because they have not been backed by money or effort on the comprehensive scale that is needed to bring results. All the resolutions you pass from now till doomsday won't do any better unless their good intent is followed by efficient action. You will need a central bureau to coordinate and unify the mass of feeder route data you will gather, a bureau charged with the efficient presentation of your wishes. This work will cost money. The industry will provide some of it, but I don't think they can or should be expected to contribute very heavily.

With a feeder route bill providing for fair and impartial certification, no one in the industry is going to have any assurance that he will directly profit by feeder route operation; no manufacturer can be sure his planes will be used. There is, however, one group of people who know that they will benefit, and that is all those who want air service and will use it.

A modest contribution from each member of the chamber of commerce or of the business clubs in all the towns that want air service would provide funds sufficient to carry the work through and to turn all this talk into conclusive action. Less than one mill per person in the air service area of the proposed feeder route system would be adequate. It would pay for the preparation of charts mapping the

routes, each airport and its surface connecting routes, together with data on costs, schedules, and so forth, arranged specifically for each congressional district so that each Congressman would have before him just what his constituents wanted. It would pay for a bureau in Washington to disseminate information before the bill was acted on and to see that the case for each community received fair and impartial consideration after it was passed.

Your sponsorship would bring in the necessary contributions to start this work. Under your direction such a bureau could be kept active and well informed. The combined and coordinated voice it represented would be heard and heeded.

There you have my suggestions on what you gentlemen can do right now to get action on feeder routes. Prompt action should get concrete results before Congress adjourns, and will make it possible to have feeder lines operating before your next annual convention. Your citizens are either going to say, through you, where and when they want air service and what it shall be, or, without your coordinating action, they will wait until federal agencies decide what they should have. I believe the choice rests with you.