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THE FEDERAL AIRPORT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

JOHN S. WYNNE*

For many months last winter, it was my pleasure to work with a number of you gentlemen in the program of constructing airports, made possible through the use of relief labor and funds of the CWA. The appropriation of money by the Federal Government, through which these airports were made possible, was primarily intended, you will recall, for the relief of unemployment. It was necessary, therefore, for us to adjust our plan of action to meet that end—the relief of unemployment. The allocation of funds for this work was vested in an organization other than the Bureau of Air Commerce. This set-up necessitated a revision of our plans from time to time, in order to conform to their program. It was their program, even though we were an integral part of it.

Through the splendid cooperation of the aviation commissions of the various states and others who joined in the work, this program is rapidly being brought to as successful a conclusion as might be expected under the circumstances, and I want to take this opportunity to thank you on behalf of the Bureau of Air Commerce for your fine efforts in this direction. I am particularly pleased to have an opportunity to meet many of you face to face who heretofore have been represented in my mind only as signatures.

On December 1, 1933, there were a total of 2,182 airports existing in the United States. This number included 558 municipal airports, 653 commercial airports, 266 Department of Commerce intermediate fields, 55 Army airdromes, 18 Naval and Marine Corps air stations, 23 state operated fields, 550 marked auxiliary fields, 43 private fields and 16 fields for miscellaneous Government activities. Three hundred and sixty possessed some form of night lighting equipment available on demand. The Department's 266 intermediate fields, of course, are equipped with night lighting equipment. These lights burn all night long. In other words, only approximately one-quarter of the existing fields were equipped for night flying of any kind.

As a result of the CWA airport program, more than one thousand landing field projects were undertaken. A very im-

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portant part of the program included the air marking of towns through roof identifications. Five thousand municipalities were so marked. Work will have been undertaken and completed on some 1,250 airports before this work is brought to a close. Approximately 40 per cent will have been reconstruction and enlargement of existing airports, while 60 per cent of the aggregate will represent establishment of new landing areas. The number of airports in this country, therefore, will have been increased by one-third of the total number in existence last December, besides making substantial improvements to some five hundred important existing airports.

The Bureau of Air Commerce had hoped that it would be possible for us to give you gentlemen some definite word as to what might be expected this winter in the way of help from the Federal relief organizations in the continued construction of airports. We have had several conferences with FERA officials in Washington, but their plans are not sufficiently advanced yet to enable us to give you very definite information. Relief work of some kind will be carried on but until further funds are allotted by the President, specific plans will not be forthcoming.

We are inclined to believe that the Federal Administration will play a less prominent part in the formulating of plans for relief projects than heretofore. Money, in all probability, will be allocated to the various state relief administrators for use on such projects within their states as they deem advisable. The state administrators we believe will be given more latitude in the allocation of this money for materials and equipment than was the case last winter. If this is to be the case, it appears that our success in creating new landing fields in any given locality will be contingent upon the efforts of those interested in aviation within the state. The Relief Administration does not plan to allocate money to the Bureau of Air Commerce for the purpose of maintaining an advisory organization. State administrators may in their discretion employ such assistance locally. We are hopeful that in the states where state aviation commissions exist a program will be worked out locally between yourselves and your state relief administrators. It is only in this way that a continuation of the airport program this winter will be possible. This can only be done through a well planned effort on your part to work with the state administrator giving full understanding to the problems with which he is confronted. You may be sure that if this work is decentralized as we

expect it will be, the Bureau of Air Commerce stands ready to cooperate to the fullest extent in any problems with which you might be confronted.

A bill has been prepared, known as the "Federal Airport Bill," which will be presented to the next Congress, asking the enactment of legislation for airport construction work similar to the Federal Highway Bill now in existence. If this becomes a reality, the Federal Government will allocate to various states funds for airport construction to be matched by the states under certain ratios to be determined later and will result in long term planning for future airport construction.

In the past the Bureau of Air Commerce has spent considerable money in an effort to carry out a plan of rating airports. Out of 2,100 airports existing last December only 300 were so rated. We now believe that the expenses of inspection and routine paper work in connection with this system are far in excess of the benefits derived. Because of the varying terrain features in various sections of the country, it is difficult to devise a system of rating which would be equitable to all. We now have under consideration the advisability of eliminating the rating of airports entirely or adopting a much simpler procedure of recognition. I hope it will be possible before this meeting adjourns for the Bureau to have the benefit of the ideas of the state aviation commissions in this respect.

The Bureau is hopeful that as a result of this and subsequent meetings a uniform airport code as to traffic regulations might be agreed upon and used in all states.

Our contact with municipalities within your states during this airport construction program makes it appear advisable for the Bureau of Air Commerce to prepare a new handbook on airport construction which will answer in simple language the many questions which have arisen and which heretofore have called for an inspection trip. Such a handbook should deal, in our opinion, with the problems of drainage, stabilization of soil, surfacing, lighting, approaches, and choice of sites gathered from experience to date.

There are three serious problems facing airport development today.

- (1) The study of the stabilization of soil. No paved runways should be attempted on an airport without first examining and classifying the type of soil upon which the runway is to be laid.

- (2) The question of control of areas adjacent to and surrounding the airport.
- (3) The possible preparation of the airport for safe blind flying landings and take-offs.

With numerous complaints of dangerous obstructions surrounding heavily trafficked airports, and individual cases of "spite fences," it seems imperative that the individual State Governments should take steps to either exercise their right of eminent domain within their boundaries or delegate this right to their counties, cities or villages which possess airports within their borders, in somewhat the same manner as the State of New York did recently in an Act called "Prohibition, Certain Structures Within an Airport Zone." In this Bill the State of New York delegates the power to the county, city or village which possesses an airport to condemn and acquire by purchase or gift, and the right to abate or remove any structure, building, tower, pole, wire, tree or other thing located within 1500 feet of such airport, landing field or seaplane harbor, which the county, city or village shall determine to constitute a menace to the safety of aircraft. The State also gives the municipality the right to condemn or acquire by purchase or gift for a number of years or perpetually and the right to place and maintain obstruction markers and/or lights upon any structure, building tower, pole, wire, tree or other thing located within 1500 feet of such airport, landing field or seaplane harbor. This Bill was passed and approved April 6, 1934. It is not recommended that the Bill be copied in whole, but certainly the general thrust and purpose of the Bill is worthy of your careful consideration. There is no doubt but that similar legislation in other states would be helpful to the development and protection of safe airports.

In closing I should like to say that it is Mr. Vidal's wish that the Bureau do everything in its power to encourage a closer relationship between this Federal agency and your body such that we might more effectively serve our purpose, namely, the advancement of aviation.