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THE FEDERAL WORK RELIEF PROGRAM AND STATE AVIATION ENCOURAGEMENT*

Fred L. Smith†

(1) Opportunities Under the Civil Works Administration:

When the Civil Works Administration began to function shortly after November 15th of last year, the primary object was to create jobs for the unemployed. It was considered far better to put men to work on some constructive project than to dole out money with which these unemployed might be fed, sheltered and clothed. The opportunities for improvement of aeronautical facilities were immediately apparent.

Three main lines of work presented themselves, namely: the construction of new fields; the improvement of existing fields; and the construction of air markers.

Through the cooperation of Federal and State aeronautical groups, a program was initiated about December 1st which provided for the improvement of many of our present landing fields, and the construction of a number of new ones. Work on landing fields has fitted in admirably, for several reasons:

(1) because the greatest need for landing fields—in many states, at least—is in the vicinity of centers of population, where the unemployment situation is most acute;
(2) because much of this work can be done by unskilled labor;
(3) because the construction of a landing field is a project of such unquestionable utility; and
(4) because such projects, when completed, stand out and will survive as worth-while developments when other hastily conceived projects are forgotten entirely.

(2) The Present Status of the Civil Works Administration and the Federal Relief Program:

At this moment the activities of the Civil Works Administration are rapidly becoming history, and we are looking forward

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to the possibilities under the Federal Relief Program to be initi-
ated about April 1st. So far as can be seen at present, the change
in nomenclature and organization will have but little effect on the
prosecution of the aeronautical development program. It behooves
us, therefore, to renew our efforts to have included in the future
program a fair share of work on our aeronautical program.

(3) Suggested Program for State Officials:

In looking back upon the accomplishments under the Civil
Works Administration, while there may have been a number of
different factors affecting the prosecution of programs in the vari-
ous states, it is glaringly evident that practically all the dissatis-
faction with the Civil Works Administration’s activities has been
the result of either inadequate planning, or the lack of any plans
whatever. I believe it is highly important, therefore, at this time,
to suggest a program for state officials which will insure not only
the allotment of a fair share of work on aeronautical develop-
ments, but also the most efficient use of this labor once it is al-
lotted. Whether the various states have directors of aeronautics,
commissions, or merely airport advisors, the requirements for plan-
ing are essentially the same.

The first requirement is the preparation of a general plan for
the location of landing fields about the state. This plan should
be developed without any reference to difficulties which might be
encountered in the acquisition of sites—at least insofar as dealings
with property-owners are concerned. It should, of course, take
into consideration the location of airlines which are either operat-
ing at present or which have operated intermittently up to this
time. It should also include a consideration of both Federal and
State airlines whose development might reasonably be expected
in the near future. It should also include a careful study of pos-
sible air traffic along the main Federal airways, as well as inter-
state operations which may tie in with the already established
Federal airways. This planning will require a great deal of
thought, especially in those states which have very little aerial traf-
cic, at present, either of Federal or infra-state character. It will
require careful study by people thoroughly conversant with aero-
nautical activities in the state and with the Federal airways pro-
gram.

This plan will vary considerably for each individual state,
as can be seen by a very superficial study of the status of several
states in our group. To be specific, in Ohio, almost every county with the exception of a few in the southern section of the state is traversed by a Federal airline at the present time. Obviously, our plan for landing fields is considerably different from that of Michigan, where the southern counties only are traversed by Federal airlines at the present time. It is also slightly different from the situation in Indiana, where there are fewer large cities. It is practically the same as the situation in Illinois, where airlines cover practically all of the state and, hence, make it necessary to consider practically every landing field from the standpoint of its utility to the larger aircraft which are already operating over practically every section of the state.

Therefore, this general plan for each state will vary, for the above reasons, not only insofar as the location of fields is concerned, but also in the determination of the size of the areas which will be considered adequate, and the facilities which ought to be provided. Fields far off Federal and State airways may be considered adequate when they provide merely a landing area sufficient to take care of present local needs; on the other hand, fields near Federal and State airways ought to be large enough for landings by air liners which may be forced down. In addition to being a field larger than one required for purely local operations, lighting equipment is almost as essential, since so much of airlines' operations at present is conducted at night. The marking of these fields near airlines is also of paramount importance, because of the frequency with which pilots from out of the state fly along these main airways. Naturally, a field which is not marked adequately is of little service whatever to any except local pilots familiar with its location.

(a) Selection of Sites—After the preparation of a general plan for the location of fields about the state, the persons or commission in charge of the program should concern themselves with the selection of sites. This work must be done by personnel entirely familiar with the flying of airplanes. As our experiences in the past have indicated, a landing field as selected by a layman is very apt to be entirely unsatisfactory. Even the recommendations of war-time pilots who have not kept pace with the latest developments in aviation are, often-times, embarrassing. In Ohio, we asked local groups to find as many possible sites as they could before our inspectors arrived to check them, and have had many instances where we have had to look up entirely different sites, due to the lack of possibilities at any of those selected by the local
groups. Our airport inspectors are experienced pilots who have been flying actively for the past five or ten years. It is only men of this type on whom state administrators can rely entirely for recommendations. The selection of the site is, of course, of foremost importance. Unless a proper site is selected, no amount of work can make it entirely suitable.

Standard specifications as to sites are not particularly useful. In parts of the country where a field of ideal size can be found, one of the most important responsibilities of the inspectors selecting the sites is to decide whether or not an irregular field, or merely a landing strip, will be worthwhile developing.

In the selection of sites for development under the Civil Works program, and for improvement under the Federal Unemployment Program which is about to begin, due consideration should be given to the fields which have been partially developed entirely by the initiative of present aircraft operators. While the Federal government has evinced no particular interest in the development of these fields—which they consider as “already established”—the fact remains that in many states a large per cent of the present so-called “established” fields are badly in need of enlargement or improvement. Furthermore, in the selection of a site for development, we have found in Ohio that the improvement of an already established field was a much sounder proposition than the construction of a brand new field, where no aeronautic activity exists at the present time. It is certainly reasonable to assume that where operators have struggled along for a number of years on small, rough, undrained fields, surrounded by all kinds of hazards, operations would pick up tremendously if the fields were improved in accordance with plans prepared under the Civil Works program. Here, again, the situation is distinctly an individual one for the various states. We have over 130 fields listed in Ohio, and except in certain sections of the state we have no particular need for new fields. A great many of these present fields, however, need extensive improvement which we feel should be taken care of at this time. Naturally, in states which had very few fields before the Civil Works program began, most of their activities will be confined to the construction of new fields.

(b) Leases and Options—In order to satisfy the Federal requirements, fields must be leased for a five year period, with an option to purchase. The form of lease used probably varies considerably within any one state, and may vary widely in different states. When leases are made on fields which are already operat-
ing, it has been possible for municipalities to ask the operators whom they license on the fields to take over the responsibility of their maintenance, and hence the only obligations of many cities in our state are purely nominal. Of course where new fields are established where there are no operators, the local sub-division taking the lease must assume responsibility for the maintenance of the field over the five year period, as required by the Federal government. The state advisor or commissioner should explain this requirement very carefully to municipalities or political subdivisions negotiating these leases, so as to eliminate any dissatisfaction which might arise later due to unexpected obligations.

After the site has been selected, a careful survey and work analysis should be made. These surveys (as shown on the blueprints and photostats as exhibited) form the basis for reasonably close estimates for the calculation of the amounts of clearing and grubbing, fence removal, excavation, fencing, seeding and marking. With this data at the disposal of the central office, a proper application for funds for the job can be presented. In some instances we have surveyed a number of sites before a final selection has been made, so as to make the selection of the best site possible.

It is only by the preparation of a general plan, and by the employment of experienced personnel, that adequate plans can be prepared for a landing field program in any state. At the present time, with the Civil Works Administration program tapering off to a conclusion by March 30th, it is only natural to expect a considerable let-down in the planning activities of state aeronautical groups. It should be remembered, however, that with the government definitely committed to an unemployment program, our real work has just begun. As I told you before, most of the difficulties connected with C. W. A. activities up to the present time have been the result of inadequate planning; and it is, therefore, of the utmost importance that we plan carefully for any possible future developments. Even though many of our projects may never get beyond the planning stage, the value of this work cannot be considered a loss. Regardless of how soon industry absorbs the unemployed, the preparation of proper plans will find us ready to go forward with our program at any future time, when a suitable opportunity presents itself.

(c) Summary—A final word on planning may require a careful definition of just what constitutes a “complete” airport. While the Department of Commerce distinguishes between a “landing field” and an “airport,” it is not at all specific as to just what im-
provements should be made on a piece of farming property, to make it a first-class field. A complete airport—at least insofar as Ohio is concerned—should provide the following:

(1) Adequate landing area, whether it be an all-way field of sufficient length, in two directions, for the landing and taking off of any airplane.

(2) A surface graded to as uniform a grade as possible, this grade not to exceed 2% at any place in the landing area.

(3) An adequate drainage system.

(4) A sod surface which, combined with adequate drainage, should keep the field available for light traffic through practically all seasons of the year.

(5) An adequate fence about the entire landing area, to prevent trespassing.

(6) Standard Department of Commerce field and boundary markers, to make the field or runways easily identified from the air. In this connection, I believe it is of utmost importance that uniform markers be used by every state, so as to avoid confusion when comparatively inexperienced pilots make cross-country trips.

(7) A landing tee or wind sock, located so as to be easily found by even inexperienced pilots.

(8) Adequate toilet facilities. While this subject is one about which people generally may talk only in whispers, the situation should be faced and studied very carefully. One of the most disgusting deficiencies of many of our so-called airports at the present time is the lack of adequate toilet facilities when crowds gather to witness air shows or to greet some famous flyer. There is no excuse in the world for the lack of foresight which results in literally hundreds of people being made uncomfortable when visiting airports. It is not only necessary that adequate facilities be provided, but there is no justification, in this day and age, for not keeping such facilities in a neat and orderly condition.

(9) The provision of a well supplying wholesome water. Many of our airline passengers are soured on air travel, not by the service which the airplanes themselves offer, but by the totally inadequate toilet and drinking water facilities along the route.

(10) Where the traffic warrants it, a clean restaurant, with a supply of food to take care of normal needs.

(11) Again where traffic warrants it, adequate storage and servicing facilities for airplanes.

(12) Boundary lighting and an airport beacon, so as to make the field available for aircraft 24 hours of every day.

(13) In states such as we have in the central west, adequate
hard-surfaced runways, so as to permit landings and take-offs at all seasons of the year. While we are not and should not advocate the installation of such runways at every field, these runways must be regarded as absolutely essential on fields upon which the traffic is comparatively heavy, and where operations are carried on all year round.

I believe that in the complete planning for any state, all of these points should be kept in mind, and plans should be made for the inclusion of all of these features where the construction of a complete airport is deemed necessary. It is true that the airport activities under the Civil Works program have been confined largely to providing more adequate landing areas in the various states. As we plan for the future we should, of course, keep in mind the inclusion of all of these features which are absolutely necessary to make our airports entirely satisfactory.

(4) Conclusion:

In closing, I would like to stress again the individual nature of the work in the various states. The general plan is, of course, affected greatly by the present status of both Federal and State airways in any given state. Further than that, the opportunities for developing an extensive program in any state will depend very largely upon its industrial or agricultural characteristics. Unemployment is now, and probably will continue to be, of greater concern near our centers of population, and may confine our activities to work on our program on fields near the centers of population, even though it may seem much more desirable to construct fields in rural or sparsely settled areas.

The nature of the terrain affects the planning of a program very markedly. Obviously, states in a mountainous region have an entirely different problem from those in the central west, where suitable sites are almost limitless in number. Some states, such as Ohio, are concerned with the development of a program both in hilly and in comparatively level areas. Western states, with large desert areas, comparatively small populations and large areas of public land or land which can be purchased for nominal amounts, have an entirely different job from what we have in the central west and in the eastern states.

While keeping in mind that each state's problems are largely individual, it is necessary to keep the whole Federal program before us so that, as our landing field program nears completion, each state unit will fit harmoniously into the national picture.