



April 22, 2013

Hon. James Simpson  
Commissioner  
Department of Transportation  
1035 Parkway Avenue  
PO Box 601  
Trenton, NJ 08625-0601

Dear Commissioner Simpson:

During our meeting last month, we talked about the critical threat to Solberg Airport. As promised, this letter is written to commemorate for you some of its unique history including its most unfortunate ongoing legal battle and to respectfully encourage NJDOT to take action now.

Mr. Thor Solberg was a naturalized citizen from Norway. When he first came to the United States, he worked in a bicycle shop (much like the Wright brothers). He became interested in aviation, became a pilot and ultimately an aviation pioneer. He became the first aviator to make a transatlantic flight from the United States to Norway. He delivered the first air mail from the United States to Norway. His aircraft was powered by a New Jersey made Wright Whirlwind engine. His entire flight was front-page stuff in every major newspaper.

Mr. Solberg was also a concerned citizen with what in those days was a unique concern; actually a theory. He was apprehensive that the Nazi government in Germany could establish airbases in Greenland and conduct direct bombing attacks on Boston, New York, Washington and Chicago. His flight in 1935 proved that theory. He presented this proof in person to President Roosevelt. The president sent the Army to investigate. The Army found the Germans were building bases in Greenland and they "caused them" to withdraw. President Roosevelt named Thor Solberg "A Great American", presenting the citation in the White House. Subsequently, during World War II, Mr. Solberg trained over 5000 air cadets as military aviators, without a single accident, which itself, was a singular achievement.

During the 1930's, Mr. Solberg purchased huge expanses of contiguous farmland in Hunterdon County to set the stage for his dream of a regional airport just west of New York. In 1941 Mr. Solberg was granted approval by the Readington Township Committee to have a commercial airport on that site. After the war, Mr. Solberg returned to Solberg Airport which at the time had 6 runways: 2 parallel north-south at 3500 feet, two parallel east-west at 3500 feet and 4500 feet and then 2 crossing at 4500 and 5500 feet. One was paved. In 1958, the FAA realized the strategic location of Solberg Airport and located a vortac on the airfield. It is important to note that the FAA has recently selected Solberg vortac as one of the limited number of vortacs to remain in service as the country transitions into NextGen.

In the late 1960s, the NYNJPA declared that a fourth jetport was necessary to serve the New York Metropolitan area. Solberg Airport was one of the three potential locations. Momentarily, it was possible Solberg would become a second Newark class airport in New Jersey. But it did not transpire. The Township of Readington rose in opposition and the NYNJPA postponed the selection.

**New Jersey Aviation Association**  
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Solberg Airport was once again in the spotlight in the late 1980's as the possible replacement site for Linden Airport. Their plan was to pave both runway 4/22 and runway 13/31 and to make other substantial airport improvements. This would create a genuine regional facility. Again Readington Township fought this. Eventually the political climate changed in the City of Linden and the Linden Airport remained open.

In 2002 the NJDOT itself entered into a contract to purchase the airport from the Solberg family.

One can see that Solberg Airport has long been considered an important part of New Jersey's air transportation infrastructure. Thanks to Mr. Solberg, it has the land required to become the regional aeronautical facility so much needed in that area of the State. And that is exactly why Readington Township has gone to such extreme measures to prevent the airport's improvement and growth. Now, they are attempting to condemn and take ownership and/or control of 86% of the airport's property. Without the land the airport cannot become an up-to-date regional airport. It cannot grow apace with modern developments in aviation. It cannot even continue operating as it has for the past 72 years!

Solberg Airport is officially recognized as an element of New Jersey's State Airport System Plan, the FAA reliever airport system, and the National Plan of Integrated Airport System. Wilbur Smith and Associates, Inc., the professional planners hired by NJDOT in the middle 1990's to develop the New Jersey State Airport System Plan, when using a blank slate approach, pin pointed a need for an upgraded regional aviation facility right at the site of the Solberg Airport. Solberg's location is within a five-mile radius of the intersection of Routes I-287, I-78, US 22, US 202, US 206, and 28, the area that demonstrated the greatest growth of new and relocated corporate headquarters in the nation during the 1980s and 1990s. During the 1990s, as world markets began to open up in Eastern Europe, Russia, China, Southeast Asia and South America, the turbine aircraft became a tool essential to corporate efficiency. These corporations are engaged in that business and need a base for their turbine aircraft.

But Solberg Airport cannot help these corporations despite the fact that both NJDOT and FAA approved an airport Master Plan in 1997 with the 4890 foot paved runway they require. The Township of Readington opposed that runway length and threatened to condemn the airport. It eventually did this in 2006.

Solberg has always been an excellent example of private-public cooperation for the general welfare. To wit: what other private family provides a \$40 million plus transportation facility at its own expense for the people of New Jersey? Importantly, Mr. Solberg assembled sufficient real estate (almost 800 acres) to create a self-sustaining element of the air transportation infrastructure ad infinitum. The New Jersey General Aviation Study Commission (**Commissioned Public Law 93 Chapter 336**) in part, found: "The suitability and viability of a general aviation airport depends upon three factors: aviation and public safety, environmental compatibility and economic viability. All three of these are a function of the quantity of land available to the airport. The starting point in determining how much land is necessary for a general aviation airport is the lengths of runways, which are determined by the type of aircraft to be served. The Commission has determined that 800 acres of land will be required for a safe, environmentally compatible and economically viable general aviation airport designed to serve business aircraft. A total of 1,400 acres will be required for an intermodal transportation station with a terminal and facilities accommodating major highways, mass transit systems and air transportation." Solberg Airport is the only airport in Hunterdon and Somerset Counties with the acreage and crosswind runway that comes close to meeting this recommended criteria to serve business aircraft.

The Appellate Division found that all the reasons Readington stated for taking the airport property were bogus and that their real reason was to limit the growth of the airport and thereby seek to take an ultra vires action because a municipal corporation is not so empowered by state statute.

If this letter serves no other purpose, please let it call to your attention the following matters:

- 1) If Readington Township is successful in court it will result in the loss of an airport that has the potential to become a significant regional airport in the area of our State that most needs such an airport.
- 2) Readington Township's actions in reducing by 86% the land available to the Solberg Airport without having followed the procedures set forth in N.J.A.C. 16:54 is in violation of the Commissioner's published regulations and a violation of Title VI of New Jersey's Statutes, which the Commissioner is responsible to enforce.
- 3) Readington Township during the course of the litigation, has asserted the argument that there is no conflict between the Township's condemnation of the airport and NJDOT's policy for the state's airport system because NJDOT has remained silent despite Solberg's requests that it intercede on the State's behalf to oppose this condemnation.
- 4) Every other privately owned public use airport in the State of New Jersey is in jeopardy of closing in the aftermath of a ruling in favor of Readington Township.
- 5) Readington Township's eminent domain action jeopardizes one of New Jersey's top ten tourism events – the Quick Check Festival of Ballooning. Without the land, the festival will have to close. Where else in NJ can this festival be accommodated?
- 6) The New Jersey Aviation Association appeals to the Commissioner to save this Airport for the State of New Jersey and thereby observe his responsibility to develop aeronautics in this State in a manner beneficial to the general welfare of the people of this State.

NJAA urges you to intercede in the pending litigation and advise the court that this airport encompasses 744 acres, most of which have been targeted in this eminent domain action by Readington Township, which has long demonstrated its opposition to the development of aeronautics in this State, now in a manner which is beyond the authority of their charter. Advise the Court that the development of aeronautics is your job, not theirs, and that every acre of this airport is important to the State of New Jersey as the potential regional airport needed in that area, and that the Court should return the airport to its rightful owner for the purpose of its development into such a regional airport.

Please call me if you have any questions or in any event if I may ever be of any assistance.

Kindest personal regards.

Very truly yours,



Jack McNamara  
Chairman