

FAA awards grant for new runway at airpark



Written by

Erik Larsen | Staff Writer

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BERKELEY — The Federal Aviation Administration has awarded a \$299,250 grant to Ocean County to build a crosswind runway at Robert J. Miller Airpark.

The grant is part of nearly \$800,000 in funds for Miller and South Jersey Regional Airport in Lumberton earmarked by the FAA and announced Wednesday by U.S. Sens. Frank R. Lautenberg and Robert Menendez, both D-N.J.

South Jersey Regional Airport received \$480,000 through the federal Department of Transportation to address existing and future aviation needs through a revision of the airport's master plan to define where the airport needs improvement and propose potential development alternatives, according to the announcement from the two senators.

"These critical investments in South Jersey airports will upgrade and expand service for the travelers who rely on them," said Lautenberg, a member of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development. "Having up-to-date and reliable airports will help to meet the traveling needs of residents, keep local businesses thriving, and make our state a more attractive destination."

Menendez said: "Modern and efficient airports are key to our economic competitiveness and travelers' safety. This investment will go towards the upgrade of two South Jersey airports to ensure they can continue accommodating comfortably and safely thousands of travelers each year. It will also help boost the areas' attractiveness as a tourist destination and help create desperately needed construction jobs immediately."

Ocean County Freeholder Director Joseph H. Vicari said the grant is a first step toward the design and eventual construction of the long-awaited crosswind runway at the 420-acre Miller airpark, in what is largely an unpopulated region of the Pine Barrens in western Berkeley and Lacey.

Planes take off and land most easily when pointing into the wind, which is called a headwind. Wind coming behind an aircraft — a tailwind — or from the side — a crosswind — can make takeoffs and landings tricky and dangerous.

In recent years, there have been several close calls and incidents related to the lack of a crosswind runway, according to county officials and published accounts.

Ocean County Administrator Carl W. Block said a memorandum of agreement on the matter was expected to be signed between the Board of Freeholders, the FAA, the Pinelands Commission and the state Department of Environmental Protection sometime this fall.

Block said the agreement will permit the county to proceed with the design phase of the crosswind runway.

"The (airpark) has been built to military standards, in case there is a national emergency, natural disaster or terrorist attack and the federal government needs to take control of the airport," Vicari said.

Vicari said the crosswind runway will cost about \$7 million to construct.

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