

ASE Vision Process: Airport Advisory Groups

Questions and Answers To-Date

Updated: June 3, 2019

1. Are you thinking about safety?

Yes. Safety is the primary concern for all of our planning efforts. Additionally, the driving factor in the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) standards for specific aircraft is safety, and safety improvements are the highest priority for FAA discretionary funding.

2. Can you speak to FAA modification of standards categories and the FAA's role in funding for both commercial and general aviation?

ASE is a non-standard Airplane Design Group (ADG) III airport as designated by the FAA in 1999. Major requirements of a standard ADG III airport include 400' of separation between the centerline of the runway and taxiways, and a runway width of 150'. A standard ADG III airport can accept aircraft with a wingspan of up to 118'.

ASE does not meet full ADG III standards given its runway/taxiway separation of 320', a runway width of 100' and a maximum landing weight of 100,000 pounds. Since 1999, ASE has operated under an FAA Modification of Standards which only allows aircraft with up to a 95' wingspan and 100,000-pound landing weight. The FAA no longer approves non-standard conditions unless an airport is so physically constrained that it cannot meet FAA standards, in which case operational restrictions are put in place. With this in mind, the FAA has demonstrated that ASE can feasibly comply with the critical ADG III design requirements it currently does not meet and issued a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) considering runway, taxiway and terminal area improvements to meet full ADG III standards.

The FAA covers up to 90% of funding for airfield improvements and maintenance projects. Most of the FAA's funding over the past several decades has come through their Airport Improvement Program (AIP) grants, which entail grant assurances. Each time ASE has accepted FAA grants, the County has made grant assurances that the airport would be maintained to ADG III standards. Should the County decide not to make the necessary improvements to more fully comply with ADG III, the FAA may downgrade the airport to ADG II, which allows aircraft with up to 79' wingspans. Funding implications of this decision include lower priority for future funding for airfield development and maintenance grants. More significantly, if the FAA downgrades the airfield the FAA may seek repayment of grants issued over the past 20 years which supported the current ADG III classification.

AIP funding has also included grant assurances that the County will not unjustly discriminate against any allowed aerospace use of ASE. This means that the County cannot discriminate or favor either general aviation (GA) or commercial use of the airport in any way.

3. *Can we look to other communities that were successful in going through something similar?*

Several airports serving resort communities have undertaken some combination of airfield and/or terminal improvement projects. The project team has identified several of these and included them in the [presentation on forecasting](#). Eagle/Vail, Jackson Hole, Telluride and Sun Valley are among those being reviewed as peer airports.

4. *Are Rifle and other local airports like Eagle having these same discussions? Can we use these other airports for our service?*

This was addressed at the [May 7th Airport Advisory Groups meeting](#). Rifle and Eagle are independent airports with different airport sponsors. The market is the primary driver of service demand. If ASE were to make commercial service unprofitable, there is potential it might shift to other airports. However, the decision to make that shift rests with the airlines. Furthermore, Rifle does not currently have commercial service. The County has reached out to staff from both Garfield County and the Rifle Airport and have confirmed there are no plans, nor interest, in developing commercial facilities at that airport.

5. *The expansion of the airport is a growth generator. Are you studying whether this would turn ASE into a hub airport (from regional to hub)?*

Airports, particularly those with commercial carrier service, respond to the underlying economics of the area and are not considered to be drivers of growth in and of themselves. ASE is not currently a "hub" airport and is expected to remain a "spoke." This expectation is due to several factors including ASE's limited airspace and ground constraints, such as the ramp and gate space which would be needed to serve as a "hub."

6. *Can we differentiate between people paid to be here who could profit from the results? This could be a conflict of interest.*

This has been addressed several times in the initial Visioning meetings. Any conflict of interest concerns should be addressed to County Attorney, John Ely.

7. *We need a process on how questions are answered. We need to be heard.*

Agreed. The ASEvision.com email address, info@asevision.com, is collecting questions which are being answered and posted to the ASE Vision website, www.asevision.com.

8. *Can't we control the growth (from regional to hub) by limiting the improvements?*

Former FAA chief counsel, Greg Walden, [provided the legal framework](#) for development decisions the County controls at ASE. While the County Board makes all final decisions on which improvements to make, the FAA plays a significant role in both funding improvements and



INFORM. INVOLVE.
COLLABORATE.

ensuring the County adheres to safety standards (airfield dimensions, etc.) and grant assurances (as discussed in the response to previous questions). It is important to note there are no plans to develop ASE into a “hub” airport. Growth related to the number of enplanements is limited by several factors including airspace restrictions (controlled by the FAA), and terminal and ramp capacity (controlled by the County).

9. What is the total cost of the ASE modernized airport and who is paying for it?

Total cost is still being determined. As discussed in a [2018 Aspen Times article](#), the airfield and terminal improvements described in the 2018 Environmental Analysis (EA) were estimated to cost between \$350 and \$400 Million. However, the recommendations made through the ASE Vision process could alter this figure and would likely determine the ultimate levels of federal FAA versus local funding required.

10. What is the budget for this ASE Vision process and who is paying for it?

The current budget for the ASE Vision process is \$1.7 Million and is being paid by Pitkin County.

11. What is the percentage of general aviation traffic vs. commercial at ASE?

Commercial traffic accounts for approximately 50% of the total operations at ASE and GA accounts for the vast majority of the remaining operations.

12. Would we be better off if private carriers had special training like commercial pilots?

Of all incidents that have occurred at ASE in the last 20 years, none of them have been associated with commercial carrier service. Given the much greater diversity of GA aircraft types and capabilities, it is difficult to speculate whether additional training and/or standards for landing aircraft would benefit GA pilots to the same degree as commercial pilots. We are exploring the options for requiring standards for GA pilots beyond those currently in place at ASE.

13. With the uniqueness of ASE, how can the FAA have one study for all airports?

There have been many studies at ASE alone (not just one) and the same could be said for every airport in the U.S. While the FAA requires certain studies and processes at all airports to ensure consistency in safety standards, the approach recognizes that all airports operate in their own unique environments and have unique challenges. Further, the EA conducted by the FAA considered the unique conditions and potential impacts associated with air service at ASE.

14. Themes and concerns include accidents, safety, and noise. We need statistics at the airport. How do we measure up against other airports?

Accident data for all U.S. airports is available at the National Transportation Safety Board's (NTSB) website [here](#). Noise information is available at the FAA's website [here](#).

15. Can we deal with an emergency crash of a 737? Can we make this part of the analysis?

Airport emergency plans and exercises are scalable and multifaceted in terms of their core capabilities. These plans are structured around a reasonable Worst-Case Scenario for each airport based on its unique operational characteristics. Airports will usually plan around the largest aircraft in terms of seating capacity to tailor plans and training exercises.

Airport Response and Recovery plans are coordinated and trained with the "whole community" during annual table top exercises and triennial full-scale "functional" exercises. The FAA requires this frequency of training for all airports with commercial service.

Airports can - and ASE does - go above and beyond these minimum annual training standards. Here are some of the additional steps we take:

- We have dedicated Airport Rescue and Fire Fighting (ARFF) teams, highly specialized firefighters who operate airport apparatus which exceeds FAA minimum requirements. These firefighters train with Aspen Ambulance District, Aspen Valley Hospital, Pitkin County Sheriff, Aspen Police and Pitkin County Environmental Health, which includes response teams for environmentally sensitive lands.
- We train alongside our mutual aid partners including fire departments from Glenwood Springs, Carbondale, Basalt, Snowmass and Aspen.
- Regional mutual aid agreements are in place with these agencies for larger scale events requiring regional response and recovery efforts.
- ASE's plans consider the influx of family and friends who would likely converge on the Roaring Fork Valley in the case of a mass causality event in Aspen.

Given our somewhat remote location and number of available hospital beds and other emergency response resources, it would be key to our collective success and a requirement to engage resources on a regional scale beyond Pitkin County and the Roaring Fork Valley. Ms. Vallerie McDonald, who leads emergency management for Pitkin County, is an excellent resource on this subject.



16. United acquisitions CRJ550 that would serve ASE (within standards). Are we considering this with the airport improvements?

Yes, as the ASE Vision process considers the level of service the community wants and how the community wants that level of service provided (e.g. number of operations, noise and air quality impacts) the fit of the CRJ 550 will be considered. Here's what we know about the CRJ 550:

- The CRJ 550 is being bought by a United-affiliated Regional operator, but not by SkyWest.
- Use of the CRJ 550 to serve ASE is not currently being considered by United nor any other airline to our knowledge.
- With a reduced certified weight limit planned for the aircraft, the CRJ 550 likely wouldn't be flown by either Delta or American in regular service to ASE.
- The CRJ 550 will likely be built in very limited numbers, primarily as a strategy by United to overcome scope clauses in pilot agreements and push pilots to agree to an overall transition to larger regional jets.

17. If there is a limit to the number of flights/passenger arrivals that the airport will handle or that the community can tolerate and who determines that volume?

Under visual flight conditions, ASE has a theoretical capacity of 32 operations per hour. This can be split into any combination of takeoffs and landings. For instance, 16 takeoffs and 16 landings. The number of passenger arrivals is dependent on the type of aircraft as well as the capacity of the terminal and ramps. The ASE Vision process will be drilling down into what "just big enough" means to the community.

18. Will we be addressing impacts to our community such as ground transportation?

Ground transportation is an essential aspect of airport operations. During the ASE Vision process we will investigate how ground transportation may be integrated with various airport development scenarios. However, the specific impacts of ground transportation will not be addressed in this process, as the (EA) considered all impacts associated with expansion. In other words, ground transportation operational impacts are not the focus of the ASE Vision process, but rather what the community wants in that regard.

19. Is it possible to get an understanding of the service price sensitivity regarding allowing/limiting the types of planes that can use the airport? In that if only one plane can land and only one provider uses that plane will there be a significant price impact? Is there a way to estimate this impact?

Yes, this will be part of the air service forecast and addressed at the July meeting in more detail with airline representatives.

20. Are the backstage airport tours John mentioned available to us?

Yes, scheduled tours took place on May 20th and May 29th, and are also available upon request.

21. In as much as the airport site is so compact, a revised master plan could reap several benefits by moving all airport parking offsite (i.e., long term, short term, employee and car rental), and, in so doing, have RAFTA deploy shuttles back and forth to a new satellite transportation center located inside of the new ASE terminal. This would require departing passengers who are not being chauffeured to the airport by either a taxi or private vehicle (driven by a non-passenger) to take mass transportation provided by RAFTA. If a departing passenger wishes to use their own vehicle to get to ASE, then they must drive to the Intercept, park their vehicle there and take a RAFTA shuttle. Arriving passengers would have the alternatives of taking either a (i) RAFTA shuttle to the Intercept in order to retrieve their private vehicle, (ii) RAFTA bus elsewhere, (i.e., down-valley or Aspen), (iii) taxi, or (iv) private vehicle driven by a non-passenger. Vehicles used in the above alternatives (iii) and (iv) could be staged from a new "cell phone lot" located across the street in the ABC. This would free up a large footprint at the airport for new uses and perhaps deliver other benefits.

The first benefit of such a scheme would be strictly financial. Moving all of the above parking requirements to the Intercept and the ABC plays directly into the permissible zone for transportation projects that TIFIA loans typically finance without providing any money directly to airport improvements, which causes a problem under the existing legislation. Building a parking structure at the Intercept, ground improvements at the ABC, and capitalizing a very large proportion of ASE's new terminal's hard costs under the guise of a "mass transportation center" has a reasonable chance of falling under the TIFIA funding mandate.

The second benefit would be the creation of an increased footprint on the Aspen-side of the passenger terminal that might be sufficient for a second FBO at the airport. I assume this would also create financial advantages.

The third benefit looks a decade or more into the future. If Pitkin County's population continues to grow, it will be more efficient to relocate an ever large number of parked vehicles to an offsite location and regulate vehicular access to the airport.

These are all items to be considered in the ASE Vision process and are normal components of airport planning efforts.

22. Is it true that to widen the runway/taxiway, land along Owl Creek Rd. would have to be condemned?

No, this is not true. All of the options currently being considered could be implemented within the existing right of way for Owl Creek Road.

23. And is it true that in order to get the full desired width, one would have to widen the other direction as well, on the terminal side?

The EA determined that the optimum solution to achieving the 400' separation required by the FAA was to move the centerline of the runway 80' to the west. The current runway is 100' wide and the FAA standard for the relocated runway width is 150'.

24. Are there any other Colorado airports at equivalent ASE elevation that take commercial traffic?

Yes, the closest is Telluride which is significantly higher than ASE at 9,078' above sea level.

25. Given studies that show ASE to be 3rd highest airport in the U.S. in number of diverted and cancelled flights, is there any way to track how and after how much delayed time passengers arrive or leave ASE?

The number and general cause of delays and cancellations is available and was [presented and discussed at the May 7th meeting](#). Data quantifying the duration of the delays is not available.

26. Is there any way to track the number of residents and visitors who will never fly in and out of ASE for the 4 months of winter, and who originate the travel in DIA or GJ?

This was part of the [May 7th air service presentation](#). Approximately 28% of all trips through ASE are considered to be "local" residents based on the number of tickets which originate at ASE. Data is not available to address the question of how many residents and visitors use Denver or Grand Junction and then drive to Aspen in the winter.

27. AOPA and Honeywell Aerospace studies list ASE as the #1 most challenging airport in the country. How does that rating influence the kind of equipment that is safe to fly in here? For example, what is the turning radius of different designs, and at what speed and load in case of an aborted landing or take off?

At a planning level, a number of potential aircraft were studied and modeled to assess suitability to safely serve ASE. This report can be found [here](#) on ASE's website.

28. John Kinney has indicated to several of us who know him that he would very much like to speak on the geographical limitations of ASE. We want very much to schedule him, and sooner the better. Can we just invite him or is there some process to go through?

John attends every scheduled ASE Vision meeting, and offered to schedule time with committee members outside of the formal meetings. He is happy to discuss any of the facts concerning ASE.

29. Who has final word on time allotments for committee meetings, outside speakers vs. whole group sessions? The committee members or the consultants?

Meeting format is a recommendation from the Airport Vision Committee (AVC), such as the 1-minute timeframe for the April 29th breakouts. Committees can schedule their own meeting times, but they must be noticed through the County. The County staff moderator for your group can also help organize any additional meetings.

30. Some of us met with a former (for 21 years) NTCB executive who is now an airport consultant around the world. We want very much for him to attend our June 6 meeting on safety. Can we just invite him, or are there "channels" we must go through?

This can be coordinated with the AVC leadership. Current plans are to bring in a NTSB representative for the June 6th meeting.

31. Is there an accurate and accessible record of all airplane accidents into ASE in the last 10 years? Assuming most if not all were private, and given citizen demands likely falling on deaf ears for increased pilot hours for private aircraft, can we direct private flights to Rifle, a much more user friendly valley and altitude?

Records indicate that all incidents at ASE have involved GA aircraft with none attributable to commercial carrier service. The database can be found at NTSB's website [here](#). Searching for all entries with the airport code "ASE" will pull all records associated with the Aspen/Pitkin County airport.

32. How coordinated will Vision Committee recommendations for ASE be with ground transportation issues?

This will certainly be part of the Vision Committee's recommendations and conversations, particularly when we enter the terminal design discussions. As with all of the Committee's work, recommendations related to ground transportation will be based on information gathered from all advisory groups throughout the process.



33. If nothing is done to the runway, and only the terminal is updated, how likely is it we will have to pay back to the FAA monies already spent?

Today, ASE is a non-standard ADG III airport with a limitation on aircraft wingspans of 95'. The FAA has indicated that it will not allow the current 95' limit and the airport must choose either to comply with ADG III standards or potentially be downgraded to ADG II. The FAA could potentially review the grant assurances ASE has made as part of accepting federal funding over the past 20 years and require repayment of those amounts. The exact amount is not readily available, but FAA grant funding to the airport over the years is many millions of dollars.

34. Do we have an idea what size the terminal should be based on current operation and the modest passenger growth projected through 2038?

Current design standards applied to 2018 ASE enplanements and operations suggest a terminal of approximately 88,000 square feet (SF) for optimum operations. Based on modest annual passenger growth of 1%, the same design standards suggest a terminal of approximately 98,000 SF through 2033. Community-specific considerations could slightly increase or decrease the SF in the final design. Currently, the terminal is 47,000 SF, and the EA completed in 2018 cleared a terminal up to 140,000 SF.

35. Does our airport have complete control over the design of the terminal, including number of gates subject to the requirements of TSA?

As [presented by Greg Walden](#), former FAA Chief Counsel, the County has broad control over the terminal design. Should the County decide to accept FAA funding for part of the terminal construction, FAA design guidance would need to be followed and the FAA would need to review the design before agreeing to fund their part of the construction. If the County doesn't utilize FAA funding for the terminal, FAA input on its design would be minimal.

36. Is it not logical to assume that larger aircraft will burn more fuel, therefore adding to the already significant air quality problem? Is it not logical to assume that although larger aircraft may take the place of two or more smaller regional jets, those slots will be taken by grossly inefficient (based on the number of passengers they carry) GA aircraft?

Larger, more recent aircraft are much more efficient per passenger than older, smaller regional jets. In general, commercial carrier operations are not the limiting factor on GA operations at ASE. As [presented at the May 7th meeting](#), it seems likely that in the future, if ASE can accept the ADG-III regional aircraft which are now being produced, larger aircraft could be utilized during the peak winter and summer periods, reducing the total operations at the airport.



INFORM. INVOLVE.
COLLABORATE.

37. There is anecdotal evidence that routes into the airport are highly lucrative. If this is in fact true, is it not logical to assume that air carriers will work diligently to serve the community, even with the current constraints?

As highlighted in the [May 7th presentation](#) by Linda Perry with LeighFisher, there is significant pressure on regional airlines as they try to continue to provide service to smaller airports such as ASE. Anecdotal statements aside, the fact is that load factors to ASE are very low in comparison to industry norms for profitable service, coming very close to the levels generally deemed to be unprofitable. While it is certain that commercial service must be profitable to continue service to ASE, airlines must also balance the availability of aircraft and pilots capable of serving the airport.