Airport project costs soaring

Contractor bills Oconee for $600K; county asks FAA for $500K for drainage.

BY CARLOS GALARZA
THE JOURNAL



A skeleton crew recently installed new outlet control structures in a drainage ditch at the Oconee County Regional Airport. Delays to the runway extension are increasing costs.
CARLOS GALARZA | THE JOURNAL

SENECA — Construction delays are adding to the costs of a $4.2 million runway extension project at the Oconee County Regional Airport.

County Administrator Scott Moulder said Monday that Plateau Excavation, the company hauling dirt for the runway project at the airport, has billed the county $600,000 to recover losses for having equipment sit idle.

Moulder said the invoice has yet to be processed.

Plateau has submitted additional invoices to the county, Moulder added, but he did not indicate the amounts requested.

A spokesperson for the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) said Monday that the airport sent a letter asking for more money.

Kathleen Bergen, manager of communications and public affairs for the FAA Southern Region, said the Oconee Airport asked the agency to amend the open grant to include $500,000 for drainage.

Bergen said the FAA has expended $2.7 million toward the runway extension. She said that amount represents 95 percent of the funding. South Carolina and Oconee County put up the other 5 percent.

There are additional funds available to the airport from the FAA, but Bergen said Oconee has not applied for additional grants to the project.

The state Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) shut down the project after receiving a report in February from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers that dirt from the project site was polluting a nearby section of Lake Hartwell.

On Monday, Airport Director Kevin Short said the project had been delayed longer than he'd expected and backed off a prediction that the runway would be ready in time for the start of the Clemson Tigers' football season Sept. 4.

"I have to talk to the engineers (about the completion of the project) with it being delayed more than I had expected," Short said.

Meanwhile, sources familiar with DHEC's revision process on paperwork submitted by the airport said the state agency sometimes moves quickly or, at times, takes months to act.

DHEC did not follow up Monday on The Journal's request for an update on the revised erosion plans.

Moulder directed queries about the permitting process to Talbert & Bright, the engineering firm overseeing the runway project for the county.

"Talbert & Bright was, and is, responsible for all engineering, permit applications and permit compliance," Moulder said.

Talbert & Bright has taken a low profile since the erosion issues emerged. It has not responded to phone calls.

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