



# FOUNDATIONS, PRIVATE INDIVIDUAL COMMIT TO \$6 MILLION FOR COLORADO SPRINGS AIRPORT FUND

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El Pomar **Foundation**, the Anschutz Foundation and part-time Colorado Springs resident and philanthropist Lyda Hill have agreed to donate **\$6 million** to a new fund designed to help the **Colorado Springs Airport** attract new flights and airlines.

The proposed fund was developed by the Air Service Task Force, a panel formed two years ago by former Mayor Steve Bach to persuade airlines to offer more flights at lower fares to more destinations at the local airport, where passenger traffic has declined for seven consecutive months and 10 of the past 11 months.

"We certainly feel there will be results (from the fund) in the near and intermediate term," task force chairman and El Pomar CEO Bill Hybl said Tuesday. "Anything we do will be graduated and linked to the frequency of flights, the size of the aircraft and affordability of the fares."

Hybl said the eight-member group developed plans for the fund after studying "several alternatives to enhance air service for the entire Pikes Peak region and all of southern Colorado." The task force found other cities had been successful in winning additional airline service using incentives from similar funds, he said.

The Colorado Springs City Council unanimously approved a resolution Tuesday allowing the airport to receive money from the fund, which will come from private donors and not include any tax money. Money from the fund will be used to help airlines pay some of the costs of new air service, such as leasing gates and ticket counter space as well as advertising and marketing

expenses to promote new flights. The Aviation Enhancement Fund will be managed by the Pikes Peak Community Foundation, which will charge the city a \$2,500 annual fee, a fraction of what it would charge for another fund of similar size.

"I can't tell you how much I appreciate the work the Air Service Task Force has done," Mayor John Suthers said Tuesday after the grants were announced. "This is very exciting. Other cities have airport trusts, and we need it to be more competitive to get airlines to increase flights or expand here."

The grants from the two foundations depend on a legal opinion, which Hybl said he is confident they will get, that the funds will help the city "reduce the burden of government," a standard they must meet in making grants to government agencies. The airport operates as an enterprise of city government.

The funds, according to the council's resolution, can be used for "significantly and tangibly developing, promoting or accommodating air commerce, air travel and air transportation" and can offset "real estate absorption burdens or burdens associated with procuring the capital necessary for attracting or growing airport services."

The airport has taken a number of steps to make the Springs more attractive to airlines, including refinancing and paying off much of the airport's debt, eliminating more than 20 open positions and cutting other spending to reduce the rent and other fees airlines pay. Other moves to bring more passengers and flights to the airport include opening a premier lounge in the passenger terminal for frequent fliers; offering free parking in November and December; and boosting marketing efforts for existing flights, including a promotion with the Monarch Mountain ski area.

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**SOURCE: AVIATIONPROS**

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