

# **Economic Development Agency Riverside County Airports**

## **Background**

The responsibility for the six county airports was transferred from the Transportation and Land Management Agency in September 1997 to the Economic Development Agency (EDA). The six county airports are widely diverse in capability and potential.

The EDA has been working diligently to get grants for the four most viable facilities that are: French Valley, Hemet/Ryan, Desert Resorts Regional and Blythe.

Capital improvement plans have been prepared and submitted to the appropriate agencies. As a result of these plans, millions of dollars in grants have been received and upgrades are in progress.

Desert Center and Chiriaco Summit have limited aviation potential and their future is under review.

Since the Blythe Airport is maintained and managed by the city, we will not review it in this report. However, EDA is responsible for obtaining grants and ensuring by inspection that this airport complies with all FAA, state and environmental rules and regulations.

## **Findings**

1. At present, there is no detailed accounting system for each individual airport to determine which are self-supporting. There is no coordinated marketing effort to attract new business or entice private air travelers to use these facilities for recreational cross-country flying or other profit-generating purposes.

2. French Valley is a new, modern facility. At present, the terminal building is approximately 75 percent vacant. This vacancy is a continued expense to the county. Significant improvements are in progress. No marketing/sales effort is evident.

3. Thermal Airport was renamed Desert Resorts Regional Airport in October 1998. It is not in an area generally associated with desert resorts. It does have a well maintained Fixed Base Operator. This is a magnet to attract additional business. The airport drainage system is antiquated and needs to be updated. One runway needs to be resurfaced. Convenient commuting and telephone communication is beginning to be developed.

4. Hemet/Ryan's appearance and deteriorating buildings negatively affect any ability to attract new tenants. The City of Hemet, as of January 1, 1999, has established a code enforcement office because they realize many areas of the city like the airport surroundings are unsightly. Hemet has recently annexed all the surrounding property.

5. Chiriaco Summit has limited capability, but its proximity to the Patton Museum makes it attractive to flying clubs and cross-country private aircraft. There is a restaurant, but no fueling facilities or navigational aid. It receives some financial support from various leases. A land appraisal has been requested.

6. Desert Center has no facilities except a runway that the county is forced to maintain through grants. The access road is no longer maintained. Agricultural tenants no longer farm leased airport acreage due to the high cost of obtaining water. A property appraisal has been requested.

## Recommendations

Economic Development Agency:

1. Establish a separate cost center for each airport so it is clear which facilities are self-supporting.

2. Implement an intense marketing effort and provide accessible ground transportation to attract more private and corporate air traffic at French Valley Airport.

3. Establish at the Desert Resorts Regional Airport an expanded ground and communication link for guest convenience to local golf centers or resorts. Update the drainage system as soon as possible. Resurface one runway as needed.

4. Enforce clean up at Hemet/Ryan. This includes landscape, garbage, trash collection and general housekeeping. Act as a catalyst to the City of Hemet to cooperate in a major appearance upgrade around the airport facilities and industrial park.

5. Establish a due date for a decision on the Chiriaco Summit facilities.

6. Enter negotiations to remove Desert Center from the California Aviation Systems Plan (CASP), to enable the county to divest itself of this airport.