

STATE/LOCAL NEWS

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*Bill Won't Rob Winston-Salem Airport, Official Says*By Mark DiMartini
Staff Reporter

Smith Reynolds Airport would not lose federal money if Forsyth County has representatives on the Regional Airport Authority, a state aviation official said yesterday.

A bill pending in the General Assembly would add Forsyth County members to the Airport Authority. If the bill passes, some county officials fear, Smith Reynolds could lose federal money.

Roy G. Hall Jr., an attorney who serves on the Airport Commission of Forsyth County, said yesterday that having county representatives on the Regional Airport Authority would have the effect of designating that airport as the airport for Winston-Salem.

The new designation could prevent Smith Reynolds from claiming federal money if

now receives for serving the city, Hall said.

But Bruce Matthews, the manager of airport development for the N.C. Department of Transportation, said yesterday that the change would not hurt Smith Reynolds.

"It would have no effect one way or the other," Matthews said during a breakfast meeting at the Airport Marriott hotel outside Greensboro. "Smith Reynolds would still be Forsyth County's airport."

Stanley Frank, the chairman of the Regional Airport Authority, also said that Smith Reynolds will continue to qualify for federal aid even if Forsyth County has members on the authority.

"In my best judgment, it will not impair funds Smith Reynolds is eligible for," Frank said. "We think Smith Reynolds is a great airport, and it will continue to prosper."

Asked about Matthews' and Frank's comments yesterday, Hall said: "They're wrong."

The Airport Authority invited more than 30 civic and government leaders from Forsyth and Guilford counties to attend yesterday's meeting to discuss the bill, which was introduced last week by Sen. Ted Kaplan, D-Forsyth.

Kaplan's bill would place two new members on the Airport Authority and specifies that the Forsyth County commissioners and the Winston-Salem aldermen each appoint one of the two new members.

The Airport Authority now has five members — two appointed by the Greensboro City Council, two appointed by the High Point City Council and one appointed by the Guilford County Board of Commissioners.

Kaplan said yesterday that Matthews'

comments should help quiet criticism from opponents of the bill who fear that it would prevent Smith Reynolds from getting its share of federal money.

"I knew that was the major stumbling block for (Forsyth) County," he said. "Right now, I think we're on the way."

Richard V. Linville, the chairman of the Forsyth County commissioners, said yesterday that his board discussed the bill briefly last week but had not decided whether to support it.

Linville said the commissioners were most concerned that the bill could cause Smith Reynolds to lose money.

"If that question could be answered, it would be much easier for our board to decide," he said.

Commissioner Mazie S. Woodruff said that

the board needs to meet with members of the county Airport Commission before making a decision.

But Commissioner David L. Drummond said that the county should be represented because the Regional Airport is now the passenger airport for Winston-Salem.

"As community leaders, we need to recognize when to compete and when to cooperate," Drummond said. "In my opinion, this is a time for us to get together and cooperate."

The bill's opponents think that it could lead to further reductions in airline service at Smith Reynolds, which would reduce the airport's share of a federal airport improvement money that is given according to the number of passengers who board at each airport.

Sunbird Airlines is the only commercial
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airline at Smith Reynolds. Piedmont Airlines discontinued service there in October 1983.

Kaplan said that he introduced the bill because Forsyth County provides more than 30 percent of the Regional Airport's passengers and deserves representation.

"It would be awful nice for us to have some say on how the airport develops," he said. "The next step is for the Forsyth County commissioners to sit down and decide if they want to be a part of the authority."

Kaplan said that the bill has been

sent to a senate judiciary committee and he will ask that it remain there until Forsyth County officials reach a consensus.

Officials from Greensboro, High Point and Guilford County said at yesterday's meeting that they would welcome Forsyth County's presence on the authority.

"The airport is obviously a regional airport, and its importance to all of us in Guilford and Forsyth counties is tremendous," said John Witherspoon, the Guilford County manager. "This is an excellent way of linking the two counties together."