

Legislation Stirring Up Fears About Future of Airport

By Carl Briggs
Staff Reporter

Smith Reynolds Airport officials are hoping their line-up of aerial attractions for Aviation Appreciation Day this Sunday afternoon will attract big crowds and much-needed favorable publicity.

But hanging over the show like dark storm clouds are serious questions about the airport's future that have been stirred up by legislation pending in the General Assembly.

The legislation would permit one representative each from Forsyth County and Winston-Salem to serve on the Greensboro-High Point Airport Authority, the body that oversees the Regional Airport.

Airport supporters think necessary federal money would be jeopardized if the legislation is passed.

But some who want Forsyth County represented at the Regional Airport — among them the Greater Winston-Salem Chamber of Commerce, the Greensboro-High Point Airport Authority, and officials from Greensboro, High Point and Guilford County — say that the legislation will not cause a cutoff of federal funds to Smith Reynolds.

The bill's sponsor, Sen. Ted Kaplan, D-Forsyth, has said he doesn't intend to move the bill out of committee until he hears from the Forsyth County commissioners.

The commissioners, in turn, aren't expected to make a

decision to support or oppose the bill until the county manager's office offers a recommendation. And that office has not finished researching the matter and questioning officials of the Federal Aviation Administration.

The federal money is crucial to Smith Reynolds, which has an annual income of about \$350,000. Most of the income comes from leases, concessions and landing fees.

In addition, the airport receives about \$70,000 annually from the FAA in enplanement money based on passenger traffic on Piedmont Commuter, operated by Sunbird Airlines 1984 Inc. in Charlotte, said Roger E. Morgan, the airport's interim manager.

Sunbird also receives a federal subsidy under an "essential air service" designation to operate four round-trip flights daily between Winston-Salem and Charlotte.

A spokesman for Sunbird said that the subsidy will total \$270,000 for the 12-month period ending May 31, but that the subsidy has been reduced for the next 12 months to \$147,000.

Bookings on Sunbird have increased 10 percent since

the airline changed its name here to Piedmont Commuter and offered joint scheduling and fares with Piedmont, the spokesman said.

Smith Reynolds can also receive discretionary funds to be used for airport improvements. Morgan said the airport is tentatively scheduled to receive \$182,000 in federal money to cover part of the cost of an airplane parking pad.

The airport officials' concern about the possible loss of federal money stems from advice it has received from a Washington, D.C.-based aviation lawyer. The lawyer said that Smith Reynolds would lose the right to claim federal funds if the Regional Airport were designated as Winston-Salem's airport.

Stanley Frank, chairman of the Regional Airport authority, said that the authority had no plans to try to designate the airport as the official airport for Winston-Salem.

"It certainly would not be a move on the part of the Greensboro-High Point Airport Authority, as I perceive it. . . . We would not take that action."

Airport to Hold Aviation Day

Smith Reynolds Airport will sponsor its annual Aviation Appreciation Day Sunday from 1 to 5 p.m.

Airplane, helicopter and hot-air balloon rides will be offered for small fees, and a half-hour stunt show by pilot Dwight Cross of Huntersville is scheduled to begin at 3 p.m.

There also will be parachutists and ground displays of various aircraft.