

Adams may build its own 'Stapleton'

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BRIGHTON — Adams County officials, angry with Denver Mayor Federico Peña's take-it-or-leave-it proposal to build a giant airport near the Rocky Mountain Arsenal, may retaliate by trying to build their own, the *Rocky Mountain News* has learned.

Peña said in Sunday's *News* that he will scrap Denver's plans to build a \$3 billion airport in Adams County rather than move it farther east to Watkins or Bennett, a site desired by some Adams residents.

Peña said Denver would expand Stapleton International Airport if Adams County voters reject his proposal. Such a move, he said, would create even more noise for county residents.

"My response to Peña's comments is that it seems he has closed a lot of doors," said Neil Keddington, manager of the Front Range Airport at Watkins.

"It befuddles me that Denver treats the airport problem as something sanctified to Denver... that if they can't put the airport where they want, they won't play ball," he said.

The Front Range Airport Authority presented a proposal to the Adams County Commission yesterday to tear down that general-aviation airport and replace it with a new international airport.

The airport authority is studying cost estimates and expects to make an announcement later this week.

Airport authority officials said they haven't discussed the proposal with major airlines whose support, they say, is necessary if their plan is to go through.

"It is something that we have to digest and consider. We don't have enough information to evaluate it now," said county commissioner Leo Younger.

But the commission called the proposal feasible and agreed to consider it.

The proposal to expand the Front Range Airport would

negate a January 1983 agreement between Denver and Adams County to build a new airport on 60 square miles of Adams land that Denver would annex.

Said Adams County Commissioner Ron Nichol: "When I read Peña's statements, I thought it was really irresponsible to jeopardize building an international airport that the state needs."

"It was irresponsible to give the county and the residents an ultimatum when they still don't have all the facts for building an airport at their selected site."

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Front Range Airport manager**

But Peña aide Tom Gougeon said such talk doesn't help negotiations between Adams County and Denver.

He said people should remember that Adams County, not Denver, chose the site east of the arsenal because of concerns about noise in Commerce City, Brighton and other communities.

"Our position is: Look at the history of this. When we came in (mid-1983), Denver was planning to expand onto the arsenal over the objections of Adams County. We were the ones who opened negotiations to move it off the arsenal," Gougeon said.

He predicted the Adams County commissioners will dismiss the idea of a regional airport at Front Range as "unrealistic." It makes more sense to work with Denver to

build an airport that will satisfy everybody's concerns, Gougeon said.

"As long as Stapleton exists, I don't think it's viable to build another international airport," he added.

Although several hundred Adams County residents have opposed the latest proposal at a series of public hearings, it has the support of several county business and community leaders who say it will be an economic boon.

Keddington and other officials would not discuss details of yesterday's meeting, but said they will discuss the prospect with the Federal Aviation Administration and the airlines.

Adams County officials agreed, however, that many hurdles would have to be cleared before Adams County could build an international airport.

"No one can build an airport without the help of the airlines," Younger said.

Meanwhile, Bruce G. Strand, vice president of United Airlines, said too much is at stake to get bogged down in political squabbles.

"We as a community and a state have got to continue moving aggressively toward firming up plans for a new airport," he said.

United, Stapleton's busiest carrier, with 219 daily departures, has signed an agreement with Denver to move to the new airport once it opens in the mid-1990s. Frontier and Continental airlines have signed similar agreements.

Strand said United favors the site east of the arsenal because it is closer to the users of the airport than Watkins. He also said wind and blowing snow become worse the farther east the airport goes.

"The farther east you go, the more questions we have about (bad) weather affecting aircraft operations and its effect on the highways."

Keddington said an international airport will be built in this region regardless of who builds it.

Rocky Mountain News staff writer Chris Broderick contributed to this report.