

State of New Mexico

Office of the Governor

Bill Richardson
Governor

For Immediate Release
March 3, 2003

Contact: Pahl Shipley
505.827.9827

Governor Bill Richardson Takes Action to Stop Decline of Intrastate Air Service and Create International Flights to Mexico

SANTA FE – Governor Bill Richardson today announced the formation of a task force to improve and increase intrastate air service, and air cargo activity in New Mexico, and work to bring an international carrier for direct flights to Mexico.

“The dramatic decline of intrastate air service in New Mexico has seriously hurt many areas of the state,” says Governor Bill Richardson. “The members of this task force will have the knowledge, expertise, and access to find the cause of the decline and recommend ways to reverse the trend.”

Fred Peralta, Secretary of Tourism, and Rick Homans, Secretary of Economic Development, and will serve as co-chairmen of the task force. They will recruit a cross section of participants from across New Mexico, representing federal, state, tribal, and local government, aircraft and airline related business, and the recreation and tourism industries.

“Air service to and within the state of New Mexico is essential to provide quality transportation for visitors,” says Secretary Fred Peralta. Peralta cites direct flights from cities within the United States as crucial for destination packaging, and flights between New Mexico communities as extremely important for the travel needs of citizens and visitors. “Direct flights are also a major driver for economic development in New Mexico,” adds Secretary Peralta, “and will solidify New Mexico’s relationship with our neighboring country of Mexico.”

Governor Bill Richardson is following through on discussions he had with Mexican President Vicente Fox last month at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. Direct flights between New Mexico and Mexico are a priority for both leaders, who plan to meet again within the next few months.

The number of intrastate carriers and flights has declined significantly over the past several years. At this time, only Mesa Airlines and Rio Grande Air provide commuter service in New Mexico.

“We’ll get right to work to address the problem,” says Secretary Rick Homans, who says rural communities have raised serious concerns about declining air service. “Passenger and cargo service to communities around the state is important to the economic health of these areas and New Mexico as a whole. It’s tied directly to commerce, tourism, and quality of life.”

The state’s task force will work closely with similar local community efforts, such as the Regional Air Service Preservation Committee (RASP), a group organized in the Four Corners area. RASP has invited other cities from across New Mexico to join the committee, including Silver City, Alamogordo, Portales, and Carlsbad.

“We are grateful the Governor recognizes the importance of this effort,” says William Standley, the Mayor of Farmington who will also serve on the state task force. “Together we’ll have a stronger voice to work with the airlines and the Federal Aviation Administration to retain the air service we already have, and hopefully encourage the creation of additional flights and destinations.”

#30#