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Des Moines Airport: Commercial vehicles need to pay 'fair share'

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Written by **Marco Santana**

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Des Moines International Airport officials said Tuesday that it's time for taxis, shuttles and other commercial vehicle operators to pay "their fair share" for using the airport's facilities. But the proposal did not fly with some business owners, who said they will likely pass those costs on to consumers.

"I can't absorb these costs," said Todd Pugh, vice president of Keck Parking, which operates a lot on Fleur Drive across the street from the airport and offers shuttles. "I am going to have to raise my fees or limit the number of times I drive" to the airport.

The airport authority board will delay action on the proposal, which they discussed at their meeting Tuesday. If approved, the fees would apply to several industries, including taxis, charter buses and parking lot operators.

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Proposed new fees for commercial vehicles that use Des Moines airport

- Taxis: 50 cents per trip
- Hotel shuttles: \$1
- Limousines: \$2
- Off-airport parking operators: \$2.50
- Charter buses: \$10

Pugh said that would mean an additional \$91,000 in costs during a year for Keck. At Tuesday's meeting, representatives from the affected industries balked at the proposal, with some saying it is detrimental to their informal partnership with the airport.

The Des Moines Airport Holiday Inn and Conference Center has offered a free, on-demand shuttle service since Lowell Scott's family first started operating it in 1975. But the new fee puts that service in jeopardy, with Scott saying the added fee could force

the hotel to have a scheduled route.

"I think we all want to work with the airport, and we want a strong airport," said Scott, who told the board at the meeting that the fee

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amounts to nothing less than a penalty for bringing customers to the airport. "But I think they are overreaching. This is encouraging us to diminish our service to" passengers.

On June 17, Scott said 85 agencies, including hotels, limousine services and bus lines, received a letter from the airport announcing its plan to discuss the fee at Tuesday's meeting. About one week later, area hotel representatives met and asked Scott to address the board.

"For them to decide, here is a way to raise money by penalizing those who deliver passengers, it seems counterproductive," Scott said.

Although he disagreed with the fees, Scott said a potential compromise, perhaps one that includes a monthly or annual fee, might be possible.

In a 16-page presentation, airport officials argued that other airports regularly charge commercial vehicles different fees. However, the airports do not follow any uniform methodology. Assistant Executive Director Kevin Foley said the goal was to simplify the fees as much as possible.

Executive Director Don Smithey said the increased revenue is necessary to maintain the lanes.

"The real issue gets down to, the airport is self-sustaining and has no taxing authority," Smithey said. "On (Cowles Drive's commercial lane), there has never been any contribution by anybody using it."

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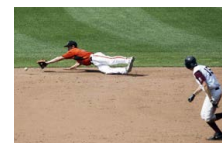


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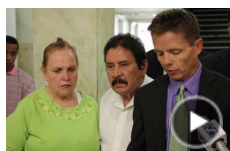
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