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**Venango County
Venango Regional Airport
Chess Lamberton Field**

Commissioners
Sue Smith
Larry Horn
Gary Hutchison

Airport Manager
Otho C. Bell

1560 Airport Road Franklin, PA 16323 814/432-5333 Fax 814/432-2684

2/22/05

**Mr. Dennis J. De Vany
Chief, Essential Air Service Division, X-53
Office of Aviation Analysis
U.S. Dept. of Transportation**

OST-97-2523-47

Dear Mr. De Vany:

2005 FEB 22 P 4: 25

DEPT. OF TRANSPORTATION
DOCKETS

I am writing you in support of the Mesa Air Group dba Air Midwest proposal to provide scheduled air service to Franklin/Oil City under the Essential Air Service subsidy. I specifically support their plan to renew at the current service level of three (3) roundtrip flights daily, Monday through Friday and three (3) on the weekends for a total of eighteen (18) weekly roundtrip flights to Pittsburgh.

Venango Regional Airport is truly regional in that it is connected to a market population of 250,000 within a thirty (30) mile radius served by excellent, existing highway infrastructure. Our recently renovated primary instrument runway measures 5,200 ft. long and 150 ft. wide and represents a sizeable investment in tax dollars. We are an FAR 139-certificated Airport intent upon growth. The Airport is the key economic development tool used to promote business in our region. Many business leaders attended an Air Service meeting recently with Mesa and Air Midwest representatives. These leaders have written and otherwise expressed their support for continued scheduled air service at a minimum of three (3) daily flights from Venango Regional Airport. They recognize the importance of this level of service in promoting our economy.

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We are experiencing the beginnings of a positive trend in our region's business development thanks to the hard work of our legislators and community leaders. County - owned property on a site east of the PA. Rt. 8 airport frontage is designated a Keystone Opportunity Zone (ten year property tax free) and a Foreign Trade Zone. Our lead economic development entity, the Oil Region Alliance for Business, Industry and Tourism, is aggressively marketing the Airport Business Park along with a nearby Multi-Tenant Industrial Site fourteen (14) miles South of the Airport on Interstate 80 and has new business interested in our area. The headquarters for the World's leading manufacturer of industrial fall protection equipment is located on property adjoining the Airport. This company has a planned expansion with construction beginning in April; 2005. They will be closing a facility in another State and relocating those jobs to our area. They will be maintaining an auxiliary plant in Mexico and place their world Training Facility here in Franklin. Needless to say, meaningful, scheduled air service is a key element in the success of this venture. These are only a couple of examples of a revitalized business climate in the Franklin/Oil City, Venango County, and Oil Heritage Region here in Northwestern Pennsylvania. Our rural area must be allowed to compete with the larger urban areas on a level playing field. Viable commercial air service helps level that playing field and is necessary for us to reinvent and sustain our economic growth.

We have realized improved enplanements in the fourth quarter of 2004 subsequent to the Airline's October schedule change and anticipate this trend to continue with the upcoming April flight schedule improvement. Fourteen thousand dollars (\$14,000) of Airport funds were expended in advertising Franklin's air service in 2004 alone. We will be seeking a Small Community Air Service Grant to help with a more aggressive marketing campaign in 2005 and 2006. We believe that the 2005 enplanements will significantly exceed those of 2003 and 2004 and that the Mesa, dba Air Midwest three (3) flight - a - day proposal connecting Franklin/Oil City with Pittsburgh is the best option for providing access to the Nation's Air Transport System for this rural area.

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**We ask that you recommend this proposal to the Deputy Secretary.
Thank you for your work on the Essential Air Service program on behalf
of Franklin/Oil City and rural America.**

Best Regards,



**Otho C. Bell
Airport Manager
County of Venango, Pennsylvania**