

# Kotzebue Protests Against CAB-

## Town Claims Its Interests Were Not Represented

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On September 25, 1972, the Civil Aeronautics Board of Washington, D.C., cancelled Alaska Airlines rights to serve the cities of Nome, Kotzebue, and Unalakleet, thereby relegating those communities to dependence on a single carrier, Wien Consolidated Airlines.

The City of Kotzebue, a remotely located Eskimo village situated on Kotzebue Sound in the extreme Northwestern portion of the state, has a population of approximately 2000. There is no access to Kotzebue other than by air.

News of the September 25 cancellation of Alaska Airlines' service came as a total surprise to this small community with so vital an interest in air transportation.

The City of Kotzebue has now petitioned to be allowed to intervene in the matter and has requested that the CAB reconsider and rehear the case.

Kotzebue claims that the interests of the city were not represented in prior proceedings before the board, "resulting in the creation of an incomplete record and the failure to account for the peculiar needs of a remote and impoverished area."

Information on which the Board based its determination was gathered in 1969 and is now almost a full four years out of date. The Kotzebue brief makes a strong assertion that the economic picture painted in 1969 is not even remotely applicable in 1972-73.

The 1969 records offered little evidence that the Nome-Kotzebue route would achieve economic success. However, due to the development of tour packages, largely by Alaska Airlines, the 1972 figures show a very different picture.

In 1972, Alaska Airlines transported 10,000 tourists through the City of Kotzebue.

"It is of monumental importance," they noted, "that only 1.9 per cent of these tourists were residents of the state of Alaska."

Nome joined Kotzebue in giving credit to Alaska Airlines for their nationwide promotion. Both communities fear that

Wien, because it is an intra-state rather than an inter-state carrier, will not have the capacity to maintain the level of tourism achieved by Alaska Airlines.

Wien flew 1,000 tourists into Nome in 1972 as compared to 10,022 brought in by Alaska Airlines. Should that city lose its tour industry, it predicted that as many as one-third of the retail businesses will be seriously affected.

It would appear that package tours not only resulted in profitability for Alaska Airlines, who stated they were willing to continue service with no subsidy, it also brought a healthy growth in related industries within the two communities: hotels, restaurants, gift shops, native arts and crafts, and many more.

109 persons were directly employed by the airline in Nome, Kotzebue, and Unalakleet, and many supporting jobs were created in related activities. Should the influx of tourists fall off drastically, those communities and smaller bush villages nearby would suffer dire economic setback.

For this reason, Kotzebue, "with great reluctance and only in the face of absolute necessity and to prevent further hardship for its peoples...authorized the expenditure of its tax funds to intervene in this matter."

For a small community battling for its very life and making daily choices of priorities from a prodigious list of "absolute musts", the decision to intervene meant the sacrifice of other much needed public services.

The little city bravely took a stand. Bush Alaska must be heard.

"The peculiar and compelling interests of the residents of bush Alaska had not been fully voiced."

They sought to make the CAB aware that there was a need for a determination to be made "more in line with facts and circumstances peculiar to an Eskimo village and its problems."

What are some of those problems?

Virtually all of Alaska's milk products, meat, and produce are air-freighted from the lower 48. "It is imperative that the residents of these villages, often the victims of abject poverty, be af-

forded the opportunity to receive these staples in usable condition at the lowest possible costs."

The possible effect that lack of competition will have on the price of all goods coming into the community was expressed by the bulk of businessmen. Medicine, mail, movies, machinery parts, and an entire spectrum of needed goods arrive by air.

Emergency medical evacuation is a common crisis in the Arctic, critically short on hospital facilities. With two carriers operating, frequent flight and direct connections to life-saving urban centers offer the best hopes of immediate care.

Every link to the outside world, whether to their representatives in the legislature in Juneau, to a doctor in Seattle, or to a relative in Fairbanks or Anchorage, is dependent on air service.

The city is asking that its single link to this world not be impaired by administrative fiat.

Kotzebue is one village speaking out. It is a relatively large village compared to many bush communities.

If it was a sacrifice and a hardship for Kotzebue to raise the funds to intervene in a matter vitally concerning the economic survival of its people, it remains to be seen how countless smaller, less accessible communities will fare in the next phases of the CAB hearings on bush service.