

Presque Isle airport faces federal funds loss

PRESQUE ISLE - If President Bush has his way, the Northern Maine Regional Airport in Presque Isle could be facing a \$100,000 loss of federal subsidy. The cut is presented within Bush's fiscal year 2005 transportation budget.

Under the measure, Bush proposes establishing a \$50 million cap on the [Federal Aviation Administration](#)'s Essential Air Service program, representing approximately a 50 percent reduction in funding from last year's levels as enacted by Congress.

The EAS program provides financial assistance to rural communities, geographically isolated from hub airports, so they can operate small airports such as in Presque Isle.

If the measure passes, NMRA would have to provide a 10 percent local match to the federal subsidy to keep airline service in Presque Isle.

"This has been presented in the Bush administration's budget before," Scott Wardwell, airport manager at NMRA said Thursday.

"It's another cost-cutting thing."

In a statement released late last week, Faye Malarkey, the legislative affairs vice president for the Regional Airline Association, said "the president's recommendation sets up a complicated reform that takes the 'air' out of essential air service, telling residents of smaller communities that convenient, reliable air service is a luxury they can't have; instead they have to settle for surface alternatives."

Wardwell said that officials at NMRA are keeping an eye on the situation.

"We are on guard about this but not overly concerned," Wardwell said.

"EAS has usually had good support in the past. We've been talking with our delegates and making them aware of our views on the situation."

No matter what happens, Wardwell said, NMRA would get some federal subsidy.

"We'd still get some money, but we would just have to come up with a 10 percent match on this end," Wardwell explained.

"We don't want to minimize any of this, it would be difficult if this were really to happen. \$100,000 is a lot of money, but we've fought this fight before, and we'll fight it again."