KAPA: FAA and Mike Fronapfel Need to Be More Transparent

FAA is supposed to regulate the aviation industry. FAA is also supposed to serve all of us – not just aviation interests, but also the full national population. In truth, FAA serves as a tool to enable aviation excess, and also insulates industry players from pushback by impacted citizens who want to rein in noise, lead, and other impacts.

In trying to resolve aviation impacts, it is important to focus on two things: factual data, and maximum aviation transparency. We have a very difficult time achieving transparency in no small part because FAA and industry players work hard to conceal key data and documents. At Centennial Airport (KAPA), the key industry player is Mike Fronapfel, the head of the airport authority[1].

Airport Ownership and Management from official FAA records

Ownership: Publicly-owned
Owner: ARAPAHOE CO PUBLIC ARPT AUTH
7800 S PEORIA ST
ENGLEWOOD, CO 80112
Phone 303-790-0598
AFT HR - 303-877-7307.
Manager: MIKE FRONAPFEL
7565 SOUTH PEORIA ST, UNIT D9
ENGLEWOOD, CO 80112
Phone 303-790-0598

Airport Operational Statistics

Aircraft based on the field: 868
Single engine airplanes: 564
Multi engine airplanes: 104
Jet airplanes: 177
Helicopters: 22
Gliders airplanes: 1

Aircraft operations: avg 958/day *
48% local general aviation
42% transient general aviation
9% air taxi
1% military
* for 12-month period ending 31 January 2019

If our elected leaders in Congress worked with us, they would impose needed requirements on FAA and the aviation industry. The result would be a substantial increase in aviation accountability. That is, skydive operators, flight schools, FBOs[2], airlines, charter operators, airport authorities, and others would all be exposed, and pressured to clean up. They would be forced to abandon their current pattern, which has been to blow off citizen efforts to balance aviation impacts and community livability.

Bottom line: we cannot achieve even the slightest balance, in our local communities, between aviation and the community, so long as FAA remains a captured regulator. Fixing this problem starts with data and transparency.

Getting Ops Data for Centennial Airport

A recent Facebook discussion focused on using FOIA to collect data. The intent was to show how much local pattern ops (closed pattern, touch-and-go, typically by flight schools) have increased. Collection of this data does not require use of FOIA. In fact, for any U.S. airport with a control tower, precise data is available online via FAA's ATADS/OPSNET webpage.

What does the data show us?

The tables on the next page show operations per month, from January 1990 through March 2023. The top table shows Local Ops by month. It includes two rows at the bottom, offering 'year-to-year' percent change in annual total ops, and a 5-year average for the annual total ops. The bottom table is the same, except it focuses on annual total ops each year (itinerant plus local pattern ops); it also includes a bottom (purple text) line showing the percentage of total ops that are Local.

While impacts at KAPA are significant and have grown in some years, the actual total monthly local ops have declined in recent years. In the tables, the light green and light pink background colors in the 'yr2yr' rows show growth and decline trends for both Local and Total ops. The trends generally match, and they also generally

1 To hold aviation people accountable, it is important to pay attention to the details of all involved. It gets to be confusing. Just to set it straight and precise… Mike Fronapfel is the CEO and Executive Director for Centennial Airport, and he serves as one of nine Board members for the Arapahoe County Airport Authority.

2 'FBO' means 'fixed base operator'. Nothing complicated, just an odd name evolved within the aviation industry. Essentially, much like a tenant at a mall, each FBO provides defined, aviation-related services and usually has a lease agreement with the airport authority.

conform with overall economic conditions. For example, note the large decline with the 2008 economic collapse, followed by a decade of growth through 2019. Each of the last three years show declines.

KAPA Local GA Ops by month (source: ATADS/OPSNET)

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Jan	13,649	15,731	14,247	18,960	13,948	17,036	10,634	14,758	18,306	14,022	13,678	12,848	17,533	14,337	13,818	12,287	10,445	8,975	9,781	9,477	9,101	9,409	9,653	9,888	8,338	9,970	10,224	9,059	13,616	11,190	14,386	10,668	9,190	11,936
Feb	13,481	16,612	18,844	15,822	17,600	12,882	14,632	14,642	16,107	13,888	15,128	10,398	17,088	10,376	11,303	13,715	10,416	9,107	10,445	8,770	7,803	6,223	7,638	7,442	6,689	9,471	10,709	9,401	9,274	9,406	10,383	8,582	9,863	12,426
Mar	15,085	14,548	15,210	18,456	17,912	12,592	18,946	18,506	17,560	18,662	16,713	13,819	16,393	13,784	14,753	12,436	10,481	12,511	12,291	9,704	10,904	10,353	11,272	9,918	10,609	13,735	11,656	12,301	12,219	12,487	14,465	11,019	10,435	14,989
Apr	16,521	13,651	20,345	17,082	15,930	15,452	15,526	14,129	17,705	13,002	16,266	15,359	18,622	14,313	9,608	15,334	12,785	13,194	11,120	8,553	8,636	9,902	10,260	8,750	9,738	10,616	13,584	12,413	11,723	15,269	5,534	13,479	10,615	
May	18,057	13,672	12,462	16,708	19,395	16,108	14,834	17,539	20,009	18,053	19,616	16,667	17,752	15,026	15,389	14,314	13,759	16,262	11,642	8,052	11,571	10,068	8,661	10,375	13,347	10,568	14,456	14,004	15,565	15,120	17,485	9,202	12,558	
Jun	18,994	18,016	16,290	19,796	21,104	20,182	15,825	17,838	18,247	24,103	20,582	17,632	18,187	18,061	15,938	14,184	6,599	14,896	13,074	8,795	13,534	12,450	8,369	12,231	12,550	15,012	16,243	7,175	15,277	16,917	9,149	12,885	10,608	
Jul	21,062	23,016	18,180	20,310	18,588	18,199	15,044	21,120	22,208	23,745	18,090	19,631	19,139	19,021	14,603	15,105	12,089	13,758	13,653	12,179	11,868	13,197	12,376	11,690	11,060	14,809	13,849	16,377	16,684	14,678	17,332	12,101	15,221	
Aug	22,710	19,864	16,282	20,722	21,906	21,132	15,466	21,702	22,958	22,303	18,175	22,399	19,059	17,891	16,752	13,337	14,235	7,303	16,020	12,119	13,313	12,398	12,609	12,531	14,131	15,517	16,014	17,385	15,550	17,277	17,891	12,064	14,508	
Sep	18,025	17,592	17,106	18,700	18,662	16,016	13,384	15,236	19,470	19,578	16,197	9,130	18,662	14,151	14,600	12,326	12,739	13,718	13,133	12,063	9,560	12,222	11,614	10,294	12,267	13,427	12,783	14,838	14,783	15,172	18,838	13,543	3,531	
Oct	19,404	16,460	16,372	18,975	18,334	19,560	14,716	11,678	18,780	20,586	17,150	19,365	16,727	14,842	15,029	12,549	11,152	13,513	12,535	9,615	9,948	11,402	10,947	10,879	12,222	13,586	13,252	14,308	12,528	12,414	16,285	11,680	14,076	
Nov	16,015	12,147	14,254	15,327	14,149	16,311	14,641	15,564	16,280	19,255	13,730	18,277	15,708	11,206	11,874	11,446	10,759	12,359	11,287	10,786	8,390	9,903	11,573	10,300	8,344	10,508	11,597	12,762	12,629	12,568	11,752	10,934	9,692	
Dec	12,089	15,490	14,002	15,282	19,625	17,265	10,758	13,704	16,137	14,456	11,422	14,751	15,153	11,874	12,373	8,656	9,002	8,482	8,653	7,243	9,636	7,498	8,749	7,532	9,795	10,449	9,481	11,897	13,192	14,297	12,187	9,989	11,274	
YEAR	205,092	196,799	193,594	216,140	217,153	202,735	174,406	196,416	223,767	221,653	196,747	190,276	210,023	174,882	166,040	155,689	134,461	144,078	143,634	117,356	124,264	125,025	123,721	121,830	129,090	147,668	153,848	151,920	163,040	166,795	165,687	136,146	131,571	
yr2yr		-4%	-2%	12%	0%	-7%	-14%	13%	14%	-1%	-11%	-3%	10%	-17%	-5%	-6%	-14%	7%	0%	-18%	6%	1%	-1%	-2%	6%	14%	4%	-1%	7%	2%	-1%	-18%	-3%		
5yr average, Local GA Ops:					205,756					203,795					187,594					139,044					124,786					156,654				

KAPA Total Ops by month (source: ATADS/OPSNET)

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Jan	26,561	29,562	27,433	36,392	28,536	32,544	23,251	30,495	36,119	28,480	29,554	26,221	36,020	29,216	28,675	27,419	25,047	21,744	24,399	20,604	20,951	21,532	23,473	23,954	22,527	21,893	24,003	20,388	27,710	24,928	29,439	23,591	21,896	23,602
Feb	28,095	30,082	37,407	30,276	33,740	27,729	29,201	28,999	34,565	28,561	32,899	21,984	33,752	22,055	24,772	29,959	23,681	22,296	25,297	19,583	18,608	16,406	19,626	18,442	18,422	20,455	23,812	20,886	20,118	22,041	22,386	19,133	22,771	24,152
Mar	30,365	26,064	28,595	35,034	34,771	27,125	35,082	38,020	36,992	36,957	34,309	28,235	33,599	28,213	32,234	28,345	24,909	28,668	26,938	21,459	24,347	23,463	26,251	23,029	26,015	28,482	25,113	25,790	25,744	27,057	26,325	23,708	24,867	28,147
Apr	30,757	24,258	35,287	32,199	30,157	30,208	29,757	28,434	37,158	26,049	33,762	30,660	37,034	28,813	23,137	34,029	27,822	28,888	26,687	19,043	20,190	21,900	24,521	20,700	24,887	23,216	27,330	25,251	24,352	30,838	11,350	27,132	23,536	
May	32,914	26,509	25,527	30,843	37,393	32,099	29,547	37,046	42,662	37,455	39,133	33,880	36,202	31,217	32,380	30,727	31,030	34,162	26,859	19,869	25,217	23,358	23,379	24,781	29,449	22,160	29,467	29,231	29,871	29,621	30,046	22,633	26,289	
Jun	36,113	33,901	33,372	39,493	40,883	37,700	31,984	37,582	39,283	46,121	40,340	35,705	37,108	35,352	31,673	29,890	22,823	32,209	29,780	22,237	28,915	27,840	23,567	28,838	30,641	30,499	33,645	23,232	31,388	33,622	24,797	29,817	25,603	
Jul	38,711	39,598	35,800	38,998	36,298	36,626	32,104	42,823	48,635	45,093	35,498	39,209	39,089	37,215	32,395	32,412	28,437	30,836	30,318	26,128	27,062	28,617	28,658	27,972	27,152	30,525	31,643	33,131	33,700	31,908	33,639	29,213	30,871	
Aug	41,509	35,501	31,213	40,082	42,670	42,173	33,342	42,715	47,336	42,638	35,935	41,729	38,517	36,435	35,091	29,820	32,331	25,787	32,435	26,717	29,314	30,811	30,362	29,083	32,570	31,592	33,357	35,121	33,084	35,380	35,560	29,171	30,306	
Sep	32,692	32,916	34,185	34,387	37,245	33,129	29,717	34,871	41,671	39,123	32,435	23,457	36,191	31,139	30,895	28,773	29,594	31,244	28,418	25,278	23,147	30,317	27,176	24,217	28,710	29,152	28,815	30,120	31,881	31,924	35,864	30,046	18,623	
Oct	34,734	31,152	32,537	36,012	34,124	38,453	32,086	29,041	37,189	39,138	32,510	35,985	32,985	31,290	30,985	27,655	25,774	31,747	27,546	21,283	22,642	27,100	25,328	25,840	27,463	28,966	28,474	30,076	26,949	27,101	32,014	26,988	29,753	
Nov	30,175	22,215	27,808	30,577	29,968	31,482	29,476	31,430	32,148	37,196	27,725	34,934	31,043	24,157	26,757	26,595	25,955	28,652	23,157	23,389	20,658	23,453	24,949	25,235	19,477	23,184	25,331	27,178	25,964	26,167	24,399	25,269	22,049	
Dec	23,431	29,292	27,253	31,160	36,678	33,057	24,157	27,146	32,509	29,262	24,064	31,523	29,975	26,357	27,915	21,880	22,396	20,818	19,115	17,436	22,135	19,794	21,276	20,293	22,144	23,158	21,121	25,619	27,237	29,362	25,182	24,160	23,994	
YEAR	386,057	361,050	376,417	415,453	422,463	402,325	359,704	408,602	466,267	436,073	398,164	383,522	421,515	361,459	356,909	347,504	319,799	337,051	320,949	263,026	283,186	294,591	298,566	292,384	309,457	313,282	332,111	326,023	337,998	349,949	331,001	310,861	300,558	
yr2yr		-6%	4%	10%	2%	-5%	-11%	14%	14%	-6%	-9%	-4%	10%	-14%	-1%	-3%	-8%	5%	-5%	-18%	8%	4%	1%	-2%	6%	1%	6%	-2%	4%	4%	-5%	-6%	-3%		
5yr average Total Ops:					392,288					414,594					384,314					317,666					295,637					331,873				
%lcl	53%	55%	51%	52%	51%	50%	48%	48%	48%	51%	49%	50%	50%	48%	47%	45%	42%	43%	45%	45%	44%	42%	41%	42%	42%	47%	46%	47%	48%	48%	50%	44%	44%	
5yr average,Total Ops minus Local GA Ops:					186,532					210,799					196,720					178,622					170,851					175,218	165,314	174,715	168,987	

Notice the strong declining trends for the 5-year average, not just for Local Ops, but also for Total Ops. And, by the way, this is a pattern at airports across the nation. General Aviation[3] activity peaked in the 70s and 80s, and has been declining ever since. Billions in subsidies continue to flow to thousands of these smaller airports, every year, despite the fact that the grant beneficiaries are a diminishing population[4]. It is very common for severely underutilized GA airports to be eager for *ANY* operator to set up an FBO or services, to fill the vacuum and generate revenues as seed money for the grants (which commonly are 95:5 or 90:10 matching grants). This eagerness translates to an acceptance of impactful flight schools, air tours, skydiving operations, and more, and a strong disinclination for the airport authority to pressure their operators to be good local citizens.

How can we have less traffic yet more impact?

There is no disputing that there is lots of flight training activity at KAPA. This fact is born out by both the total Local Ops figures, and the high percentage of all operations that are local. Note the bottom purple data line, '%lcl', which averaged 52% in the early 1990s and 46% in the last three years. The trend is a decline, but both figures are quite high, in comparison to the U.S. GA airport average.

3 FAA uses the term 'General Aviation' to include essentially all aviation that is neither military nor scheduled airline and air cargo. The term is overly broad. It would be helpful if FAA put effort into differentiating GA into three groups: public (serves a public interest such as law enforcement or emergency services), commercial (generates revenues), and non-commercial (personal flying for recreation, use of a company aircraft for transportation or industrial purposes, etc.). It would also be helpful if Congress came to recognize, aviation uses our public airspace, and if it is impactful, we should have the right to know who is causing the impacts, and why. Furthermore, because it generates profits/revenues while using our public airspace, all commercial aviation should be subject to informational disclosures that facilitate an ongoing public cost/benefit assessment and decisions as to how to manage (even ban or limit) that commercial aviation activity.

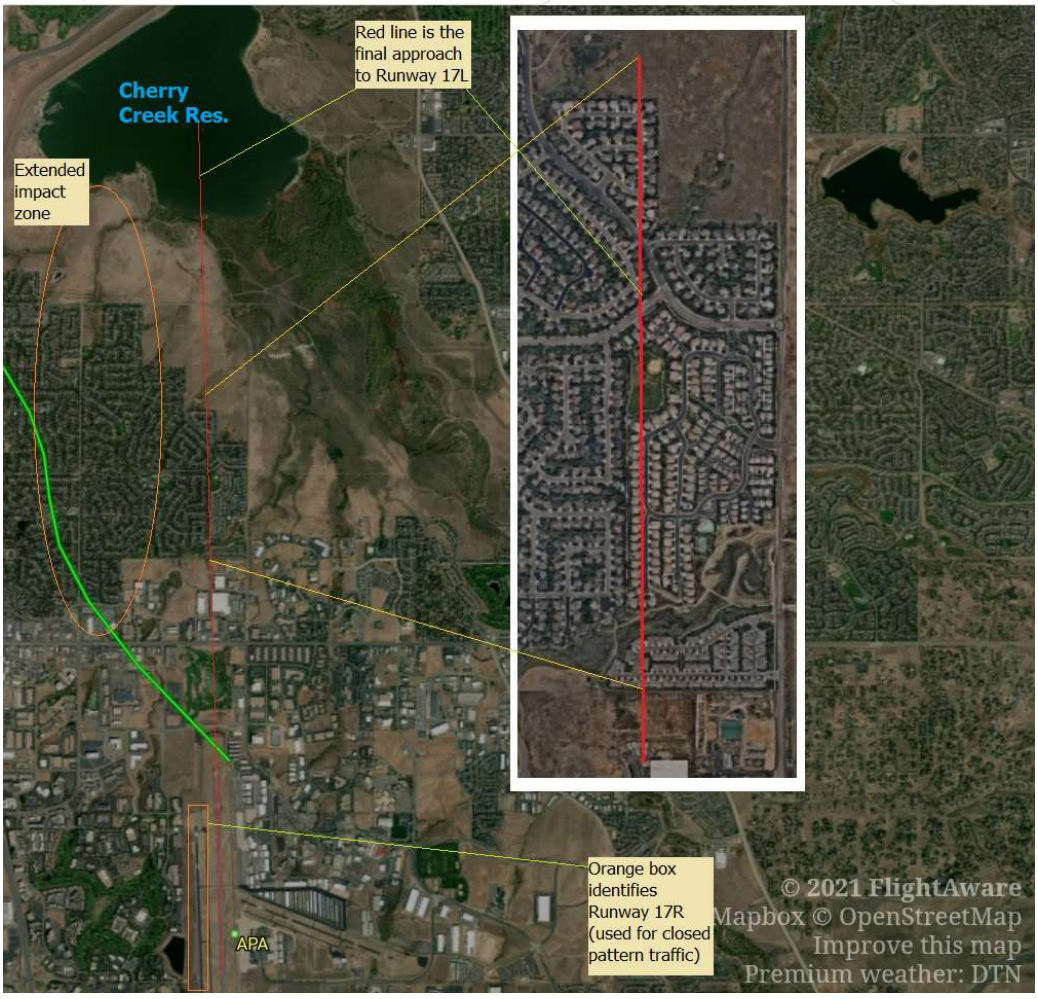
4 FAA's figures show the total pilot population is extremely small, roughly one in a thousand of our national population. And, it is not clear what percentage of FAA's pilot population statistic is actually foreign flight students, coming to train at KAPA and elsewhere.

Impacts can increase while ops decline, if either ATC changes how they manage closed pattern[5] traffic, or operators change how they conduct flight training. Online research shows, there is lots of recruitment of students from across the globe. In other words, a few operators at KAPA are making lots of money importing students to burn fuel (and diminish neighborhoods) while they reap a profit. Furthermore, if their recruitment works well, they can and will end up with a larger pool of students. To manage this pool, and to maximize profits, they will tend to set up calendars with intensive 'banks' of flight activity. Older, more traditional 'local' flight training were less concentrated, spread out more evenly through the day, and thus less noticeable to local residents. As for ATC, while FAA broadly claims nothing has changed, in the longer context they are quite possibly no longer splitting closed-pattern 'local' flights over numerous runways. I.e., the trend in recent decades is toward concentrating all closed traffic onto one runway, and reserving the other runway for itinerant and jet use. At KAPA, flight training is now concentrated on the west parallel runway, 17R-35L.

The most significant change is that the flight training business model has evolved. The current business model has been scaled up and places a much harsher, concentrated burden on those below, even with fewer local ops per year. And it does not help that these larger operators often are big, out-of-area corporations, and do not reside in the local area.

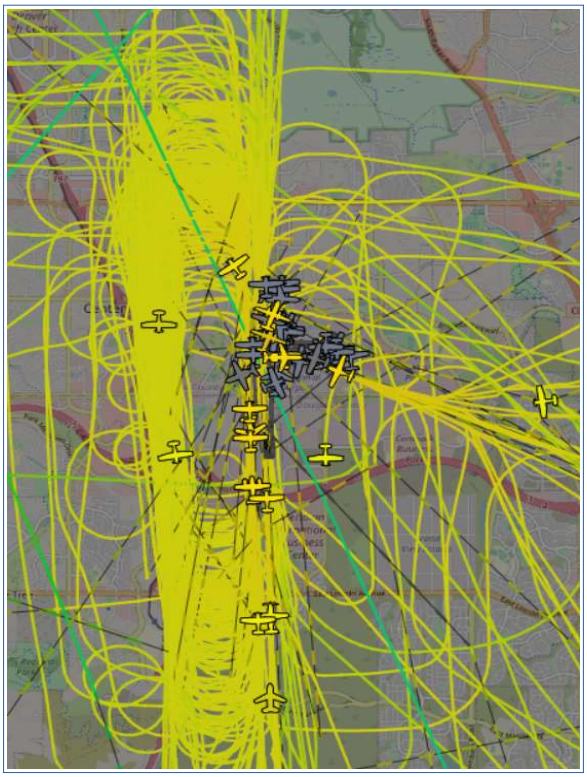
<u>And, what about the Key Lime midair collision?</u>

How did that impact operations at KAPA? The 5/12/2021 midair was a huge embarrassment to FAA. Two 'local controllers' were working the traffic, each responsible for one of the parallel runways. They failed to prevent a collision, had become too complacent, even robotic in issuing clearances and traffic information. Within the ATC culture, when bad things happen, the simplest and most appropriate reaction is for the manager to direct the controllers to apply more positive control. At KAPA, memos would circulate and recurrency training would focus on assuring better coordination between the controllers, and more vigilance in how traffic is worked. It would also be appropriate for the tower manager to be more conservative favoring safety, ordering controllers to set a limit of say 3- or



5 'Closed Pattern' refers to those flights where the pilot is neither arriving or departing, is choosing to stay close to the airport, doing practice landings and takeoffs. A related term is 'touch-and-go', where ATC clears the pilot to land, keep the speed up, and takeoff on the same approach. These are simple terms, made complex by how both FAA and industry work to discourage citizen involvement in airport decisions.

4- maximum aircraft staying in the pattern (and rejecting requests by other pilots to join the closed pattern). What happened at KAPA is management directed ATC to be more vigilant, but did *NOT* direct any limits. The net result was to stretch out the downwind leg of the pattern, north towards Cherry Creek Reservoir. An additional result, typical when a closed pattern remains full (and too full) is the pattern naturally balloons outward, in this case further to the west, impacting even more people. Here's a screenshot to illustrate. It shows a north flow (closed pattern Runway 35L), but the same problem results. Notice how the many tracks are saturating communities on an enlarged pattern, and notice too all of the closed pattern is on the west side (none has been distributed by ATC, to use the east side). Notice, too, that when the pattern becomes too full, auxiliary loops need to be flown even further to the west, just to fit into the pattern.



<u>What transparency cooperation do we need from FAA et al?</u>

Key areas of data needed include, for each calendar month:

- total number of students active at least once during the month
- total hours flown by all students during the month
- of the total student number, percentage who are foreign students registered under a Department of State program
- of the total student number, percentage who are out-of-state residents visiting for training
- total fuel flowage to all flight schools, for each calendar month

Thus far, the airport authority has been dodging release of this data. But, frankly, the airport authority should be proud to release it. For example, they can (and do) argue that importing 200 students or 1,000 students from outside Colorado means a lot of revenues for the local economy. This data needs to be mandatory disclosure; factual and timely data empowers the residents to rebut the pro-airport argument with the need to preserve health and neighborhoods.

It would be a smart move by Congress, to direct FAA to mandate timely disclosure of this data, via an online data portal. All forms of commercial aviation (such as flight training) generate large revenues and profits that often are narrowly distributed, yet the impacts are extensive on communities below. Congress directed FAA to distribute billions in public funds each year, for airport development and maintenance, and those AIP grants carry obligations. Perhaps it is time for a new grant obligation: airports receiving federal grants must meet minimum standards for disclosing data and key airport documents – to empower meaningful citizen engagement and smart local decision-making.

So, Mike Fronapfel, please show us the data…!

<u>What information should be produced using FOIA?</u>

We have a hard time getting FAA to cooperate with FOIA requests, what with delays, inflated fee proposals, excessive FOIA redactions, etc. Fortunately, the monthly ops data do not require a FOIA request. But, are there other data and documents that should be requested from FAA via FOIA? Absolutely….

1. Copies of tower training materials used before and after the Key Lime midair; perhaps PDFs of all, from 1/1/2021 through 10/1/2021, as well as a log showing the recurrency training elements for KAPA ATCs.

2. Copies of all emails, meeting notes, and other materials documenting proposals to set limits on the number of closed pattern flights.
3. Copies of the controller statements made immediately after the midair, minimally redacted so as to de-identify each controller.
4. Complete data showing the full airport improvement funding history at KAPA (and, related, from the airport authority, a Colorado public records request showing the full revenues and expenses history, to identify funds gained from flight training, and how much was spent each year to secure federal grants).

Links & Resources:

Here's a few links, for the tools and resources relevant to this Post. Each of us can use these resources, to see inside this mess and help compel FAA and aviation toward accountability.
Airnav, KAPA: (webpage)
FlightAware, KAPA: (webpage)
Airport Authority: (webpage)