

# STATE AVIATION JOURNAL

Issue No. 3

August/September 2009

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# Putting Data to Work for Aviation & Communities: Panther International Marks 15 Years of Information & Grant Management

BY ANDREA BRENNAN



Chase Stockon

What can data do? State and Federal agencies collect and maintain a wealth of aviation information including grant, bond, and PFC funding data; the number and type of aircraft at each aviation facility; inspection and licensing data; passenger and cargo enplanement data; and contact information for facility managers, sponsors, and staff. When the data is combined with strategic planning and management, however, the information becomes a valuable resource that promotes and sustains aviation, balances community growth, and might also save and enrich lives.

In Florida, several planning programs bring together aviation officials, legislators, and the traveling public to fund and manage aviation programs across the state. Chase Stockon, President of Panther International, who has managed aviation planning in California, Colorado, and Washington, D.C. and now oversees Panther International's BlackCat Grant Management System, illustrates how the data his team collects as part of the BlackCat program assists in intermodal

transportation planning, helps communities find resources to grow stronger, and also finds some alternative uses during an emergency.

Data has the power to support safety and growth in any industry, but as Stockon has realized over the years, this information has been a particularly good resource for coordinated intermodal transportation planning and assisting emergency services. Panther International is celebrating fifteen years of using data to inform and assist agencies as they coordinate resources vital to operations and planning. Starting with aviation and growing to manage affordable housing, non-profit, and energy grants, as well as state and federal transit, seaport, and rail funding sources.

In addition to its use in planning, airport data can be particularly useful in a crisis. During Hurricane Charlie in 2004, the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) worked with Panther International to combine airport data with GIS maps and weather projections to determine how the hurricane affected airports and whether to contact airports in the path of the storm. FDOT used the system to coordinate their resources with emergency management to find runways capable for landing emergency aircraft in Charlotte County as well as identify sources for equipment needed to reopen the airport and support the relief efforts.

Following the events of September 11, 2001, the Federal Aviation Administration, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, and the FDOT needed to contact all commercial service airports, public and private general aviation

airports as well as all the hospitals across Florida. Panther International, through their database systems had contact information for every aviation facility in the state. With this information Florida notified and shut down over 700 facilities within hours through a quickly deployed emergency contact system making Florida was one of the first states to completely shut down its airport system and airspace. The contact database has grown to over three thousand contacts, allowing the State of Florida to notify the aviation community whenever it needs to restrict airspace. Other states are replicating the system for their aviation, ground transportation, and seaport systems, said Stockon.

In Florida, the volume of data has become a resource for the state to coordinate air, ground, seaport, and rail transportation funding in support of the State's Strategic Intermodal System (SIS). While we all protect the individual modes [of transportation] and their funding, said Stockon, we need a more intermodal system. For example, Stockon explained, airports and seaports have access roads that ground transportation uses to move materials. If a new larger cargo aircraft begins using the airport, how do we plan for the volume or size of trucks that need to use the access roads leading to and from the airport? Similarly, when an airport constructs a new runway or facility, which department coordinates the expansion with ground and/or rail transit so that passengers can get to and from the facility? SIS is the key to coordination across the modes.

Panther International specialists help provide and analyze data in the SIS to help determine how to maintain secure and efficient facilities, and manages grants for aviation, seaport, rail, and transit programs including both state and federal dollars. Because the grant management process puts Stockon and his Panther International team in contact with various state and federal transportation officials, they have become familiar with the need for coordination among the modal agencies. He also sees how important it can be for states to view their transportation system from an intermodal perspective instead of as autonomous departments.

Stockon has been involved in planning and resource management since he completed his graduate degree in international transportation and began working as an aviation planner in the San Francisco Bay Area at the Metropolitan Transportation Commission. He was hired as the Aviation Program Manager at the Denver Regional Council of Governments, analyzing and coordinating airspace design for approaches and noise mitigation at airports surrounding the new Denver

International Airport. From there Stockon went to NASAO's Center for Aviation Research and Education (CARE), where he managed the airport master record data collection for the FAA 5010 program, working and interacting with the FAA and with all fifty U.S. states.

Stockon started Panther International in 1994 to manage aviation funding grants for FDOT, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. The company has since expanded to manage grants and requests for over \$6 billion in transportation funding (\$2 billion in aviation and over \$4 billion in seaports and transit), \$4 billion for affordable housing loans, non-profits, and carbon reduction. "Our roots are in aviation," Stockon points out, "but what we have become and where our growth has occurred is in the other areas, not just aviation."

The data that the BlackCat Grant Management System collects now for various transit and other public agencies provides a clearer picture of a state's intermodal transportation, and sometimes general health. BlackCat Grants is like "the canary in a coal mine," Stockon said; as declining government

revenue lags behind the retail slump by up to eighteen months, his analysts can begin seeing and making assumptions by reading economic indicators of future challenges. As states face budget cuts and lean economic times, Panther International analysts have also been seeing and assisting more requests for alternative grants and resources. "We like playing the role of bellwether," said Stockon. He stresses how important it is to find additional funding before agencies are affected by revenue reductions.

Stockon also understands the importance of a strong community that includes affordable housing and conscientious energy programs. In addition to managing grants, Panther International employees all actively participate in numerous civic causes. Stockon, who grew up around airports and traveling around the world, has seen countries with prosperity and poverty. Perhaps this has inspired him and his staff to give back to the community, something Stockon is proud of.

What does the future hold for transportation, the community, and for Panther International? Stockon sees major developments on the horizon: more efficient intermodal transit, such as high-speed rail; vastly improved capacity at airports and seaports; and increased interface between all the modes. Current economic conditions have increased the need for BlackCat Grant Management Systems, but Stockon not only knows that Panther International can handle the upturn in business, but they can use the data to help states understand and meet their transportation, infrastructure, and community needs. "There is an obligation," Stockon said, "for those of us who can help plan for the future, to do so well."



Vice President Scott Entin, left and Chase Stockon, President

