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Regional has broad impact, professor says

NICK LUCCHESI , The Telegraph

EAST ALTON -- The St. Louis Regional Airport has an annual impact of slightly less than \$80 million on the local economy, a university professor announced Thursday night during the airport board's monthly meeting. The \$80 million figure includes all employees of the airport and their estimated spending in the surrounding communities, said Tim Sullivan, an economics and finance professor at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville.

Sullivan also said the study assessed the airport's impact on creating jobs outside airport grounds, including food service, motels and apartments. The study concluded that the airport has created 572 full-time or full-time-equivalent jobs.

"This is just not the employment at the airport," Sullivan told the board. "There are the employees at the airport, but of course they go on and spend their money in the area."

The labor income creates more than just a \$21 million impact, Sullivan said.

"That is the total impact of all labor in Madison County that would disappear if the airport were to disappear," Sullivan said.

All of the dollar amounts are low estimates, Sullivan said.

"Every step of the way, when we have to make a decisions, we always err on the side of being conservative," he said. "We take our best guesses when we can, always remembering that if, in doubt, go low."

The study was paid for in part by the Boeing Co., airport manager David Miller said. Board members said they plan to use the numbers in public relations efforts.

The chairman of the board, Dr. Charles Earnshaw, was the only board member absent Thursday night. Earnshaw was arrested twice in a little more than a month for DUIs, one in Bethalto on Jan. 28 and one on March 1 in Wood River.

Miller said Earnshaw called the airport Thursday afternoon and said he could not attend the board meeting because he was scheduled to be a guest speaker at a medical conference. Earnshaw's lawyer, Ben Allen, said after the second arrest that the doctor was scheduled to enter Rush Behavioral Health Center in Chicago on March 13.

As for his status as chairman, Miller said Earnshaw's future rests in the hands of Alton Mayor Don Sandidge, who appointed Earnshaw to the board.

"Board members do not have the authority to throw somebody else's appointee off the board," Miller said.

Miller pointed out that board members do have the power to elect board officers, including the chairman.

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