

# Pay As You Go: Not the Way to Fly

**New user-charge  
proposals again threaten  
to put the squeeze on  
general aviation.**

**Unfair and excessive  
taxation must be stopped,  
says AOPA**

by BERL BRECHNER / AOPA 466558

■ Say one day you plan a canoe outing on the lake in the public park. You get there, check over the canoe for holes and gashes, and decide you are ready to paddle away.

But upon being handed the paddles, you're told you'll be taxed by the government if you use the paddles in public waters—say five cents for each foot-length of the paddles. (This is a cost above the money you pay for their rental or purchase.) Well, a canoe without a paddle or two isn't much good, so you pay the tax.

You and a friend board the canoe and prepare to shove off, when a "dockmaster" walks up and says you can't leave unless you pay a departure tax. Five dollars, please. The dock cost money to build, he explains, and each time you use it you've got to pay. He also notes that, since he's on the public payroll, his salary comes out of that tax, as well as the salary of his helper who keeps tabs on the number of canoe arrivals and departures.

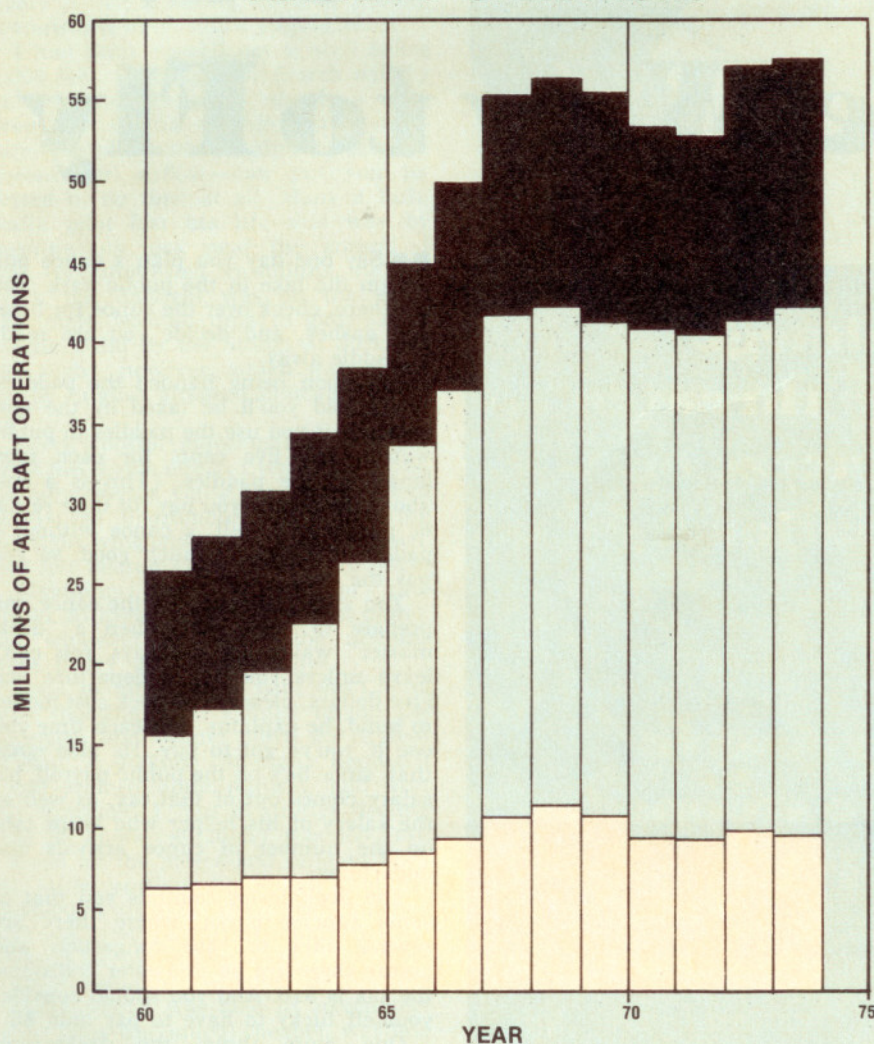
The dockmaster reminds you that at some fancier parks, where there are several slips to ease congestion and assure there are no midwater collisions, the tax is \$10. And you should consider yourself lucky to have to pay only \$5.

One more thing, the dockmaster warns. You must have purchased the new standard life preservers (throw out those old ones), and as of next week your canoe will have to be equipped with sonar and radar because you might



use your canoe out in New York Harbor with the oil tankers. Oh, and by the way, he says, the departure tax doubles next week because we're installing equipment here on the dock that will work cooperatively with your sonar and radar. Anyway, have a nice day.

## AIRCRAFT OPERATIONS\*



### Legend:

- Total
- Air Carrier
- General Aviation

\*Read values from base line. Total values include military operations.

At this point you hand back the paddles, put the canoe back in the boat-house, and hurry home before "user charges" of a similar nature are applied to cars.

It is these same kinds of charges that again threaten to strangle general aviation by creating a cost burden unmanageable by most pilots. Threats of user charges have been with us for a long time, but have been especially omnipresent over the past three or four years. A system of so-called user charges is already in effect, but is not nearly of the magnitude being threatened.

Right now, those of us who fly pay taxes (actually excise taxes) as a result of the Airport and Airways Development Act of 1970. Among those taxes are an annual \$25, plus 2¢ per pound over 2,500 pounds on piston airplanes (3.5¢ for jets); a 7¢-per-gallon fuel tax (not paid by the scheduled carriers); a 5¢-per-pound tax on the rubber in our airplane tires; and a 10¢-per-pound tax on the rubber in the tire tubes. Additionally, taxes on aviation are collected on the value of tickets sold for scheduled or charter air transportation, on the value of waybills for domestic cargo, and on each international passenger departure.

Aviators, too, pay fees for certain airman-certification and aircraft-registration services, as well as fees to the Federal Communications Commission for radio operator permits and aircraft radio station licensing.

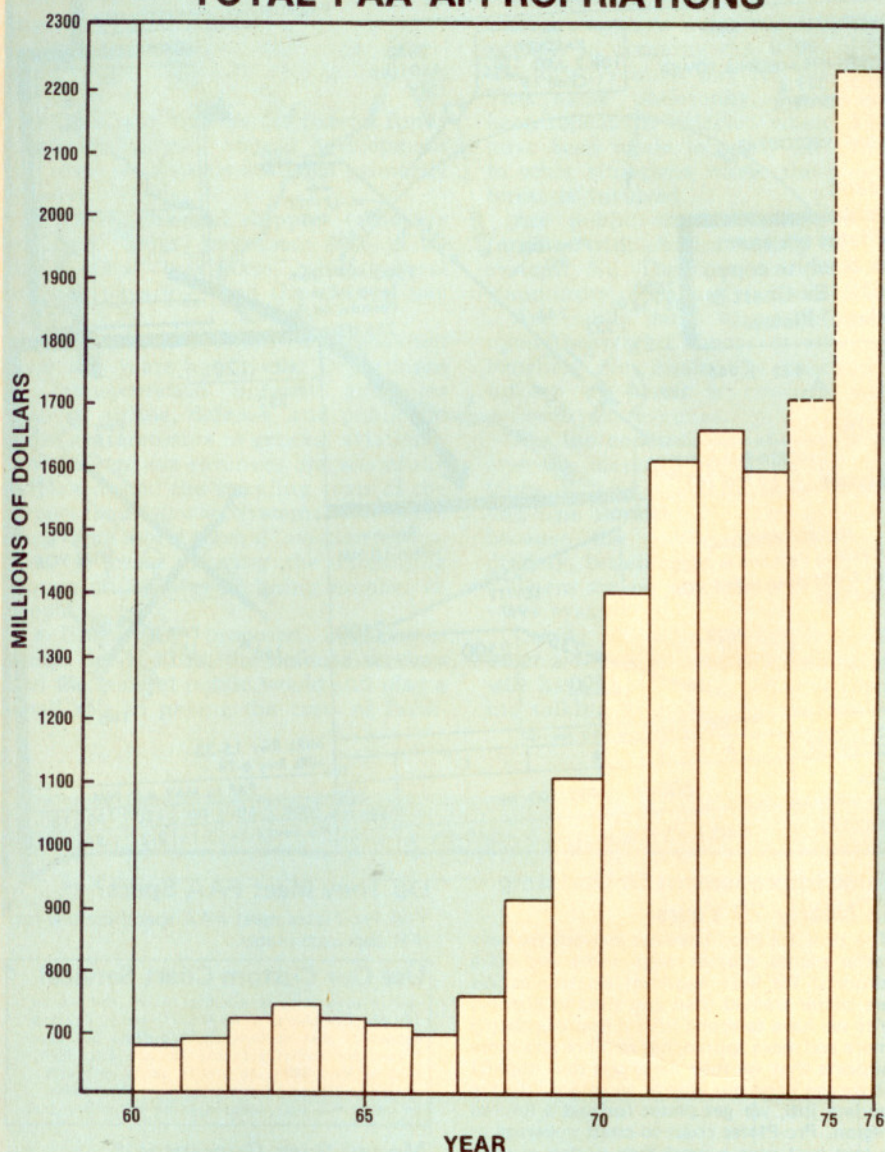
In addition to the federal taxes and fees, general aviation pilots, aircraft owners, and service businesses pay substantial taxes and service charges at local airports through hangar rentals, lease holdings, fuel-flowage fees on fuel purchases, landing fees, and other state and local charges.

As if that weren't enough, however, the Ford Administration proposes a \$5 charge for all departures from tower airports, and a \$10 charge from airports where there is radar at the tower.

Aside from the fact that air traffic control specialists would have to become bookkeepers to keep the count, and airport managers would have to collect the departure tax; aside from the fact that such a proposal would drive business away from the airport (possibly relieving the airport of a need for the tower); and aside from the fact that increased air traffic at nontower airports would create a new safety hazard for the very people the FAA is obliged to protect—



## TOTAL FAA APPROPRIATIONS\*



\*Excluding SST Funding and National Capital Airports

user charges just don't make sense.

If flying were of no public benefit, then perhaps the public shouldn't be asked to help defray the cost of a safe and efficient air transportation system. And maybe the government shouldn't be incurring the cost either. But that's not the case.

General aviation serves 12,000 airports not served by scheduled carriers (which fly to only about 470 locations). General aviation flies mail, parts, papers and people. It supplies isolated towns and allows industry to flourish away from already congested big cities. It permits salesmen to handle accounts in

four states in a day. It brings business to tourist and resort facilities. The list of public benefits is unending.

And to do all this, general aviation is already paying a high price. It has repeatedly been overwhelmed with "services" provided by the FAA that it neither wanted nor required—and has difficulty affording. In fact, many of these services have been dictated by "requirements" from the airlines, the defense services, or the FAA and Congress in their own behalf. What may be a service has, for general aviation, often served only to curtail freedom of movement and access to major airports, while at the same



time increasing equipment and operating costs enormously.

Some other points need to be understood when the user charge issue is discussed.

- Well over 80% of the federal funds employed for civil airport development are spent on airports designed primarily to serve airlines.

- Passengers and shippers (who are not direct users) pay about 90% of today's federal "user taxes," while general aviation pays 9%, and the airlines pay about 1%.

- A study of aviation cost allocation done two years ago by the Department of Transportation unfairly attributes costs of airline, defense, and public interest requirements to general aviation.

- Present tax revenues are wastefully employed, and the spiraling costs of the airport and airway systems will force more and more general aviation operations to cease, leaving the remaining burden on an ever-declining number of people.

- Under the proposed user-charge setup, the airlines, the defense services and the general public would still play a small role in paying the costs of faci-

ties and services imposed at their request, and thus would still be free to demand anything they desired without economic penalty.

The executive branch of government persists in claiming that those who use the airways must pay for the airways. This same philosophy, however, has been repeatedly rejected when attempts have been made to apply the principle to other situations where the public interest is involved.

Are public schools funded only by families with children using the school system? No. The costs are paid out of community, state and federal revenues.

Are public parks supported by taxes upon those who choose to sit on park benches? No. Again, the purchase and upkeep of parks is covered through general tax revenues.

Are the construction of bicycle paths and the marking off of special bicycle lanes charged solely to those who own and use bicycles? No. The public pays because the public, directly and indirectly, benefits.

There are no user taxes in the waterways system.

During the coming months, AOPA, other aviation associations, and all pilots will have to do some fast and convincing talking to make sure that the user-





charge proposal is once-and-for-all defused. Representatives of AOPA will be dealing with the executive branch and congressional officials, and individual pilots should comment or write to their elected officials.

Several basic remedies can be suggested to help assure that an inequitable system of user charges doesn't give general aviation the big squeeze.

- A primary method, of course, is to reduce the spiral of costs in expansion, operation, and maintenance of airports and airways. AOPA, in both its public statements and its private dealings, has repeatedly pointed its finger at excessive spending, unnecessary FAA staffing, and wasteful equipment requirements being heaped on all segments of aviation, but particularly affecting general aviation.

- The administration proposal for departure taxes on general aviation aircraft at tower airports should be rejected. AOPA and the National Business Aircraft Association have already been working to scuttle the proposal.

- FAA criteria for facilities and services, including those for towers, must be drastically revised so no services are created where the nature or volume of air traffic does not warrant them. By cutting the number of existing towers in half, for instance, the FAA budget could be chopped annually by several

hundred million dollars.

- Along this same line, the FAA should be directed to reduce, rather than expand, its control of air traffic. At present the system can handle less than 20% of all air traffic. Reconstructing the system to handle more airplanes will produce intolerable costs.

- By either repealing or amending the Airport and Airway Development and Revenue Acts of 1970, the user-tax scheme, along with the airport and airway trust fund, could be eliminated. Further airway development would still be undertaken, of course. But it would be done as the public interest and the general treasury permitted, as authorized by the Federal Aviation Act of 1958.

It should be pointed out, too, that many states and local communities have found it cheaper and more efficient to make airport improvements without federal aid. As far as establishment of new airports is concerned, private sponsors over the past few years have funded more new airports than the federal government has.

During this month all AOPA members will receive a special mailing on the user-charge problem. The pamphlet will include further specifics, along with a detailed explanation of AOPA's position on the subject.

Included, too, will be a listing of congressmen on key aviation and transportation committees. Details on how to effectively communicate your feelings

concerning user charges will be found in this mailing.

Those of you reading this article are probably still scraping up enough money to fly. But there seems to be an attrition in flying. Even at current tax and flying-cost levels, the expense of using the airways seems to be the biggest reason pilots give up flying.

During the past few years the rate of increase in the number of general aviation hours flown has shown a drop; the average number of general aviation operations at each control tower airport has declined 14.6%; the number of active pilots declined last year for the first time in 14 years; and issuance of student permits, except for this past year, has shown a significant drop since 1967.

One thing hasn't gone down in the five years we've had airport and airways taxes—the FAA budget. During that time FAA program costs have increased 70% while its manpower has increased 15%.

The responsibility falls on all of us to see that general aviation is not forced to pay for federal facilities and services which it did not request and does not need. If the public, the military services, or the airlines are unwilling to pay for services they have demanded and received through the effect of law, then the law should be changed or repealed. For general aviation cannot endure this excessive cost burden. □