

"The Colgan Air pilots were not rested. They were not ready for work," he said. "The first officer had commuted from Seattle to Newark to fly the flight."

Small airports

Swelbar said an unintended consequence of the 1,500-hour rule will be loss of airline service at small airports.

"Regional airlines are parking planes and canceling flights because they do not have enough pilots to staff them," he said.

Accinelli at the University of Dubuque said about 200 student pilots are trained annually.

"I manage my student flow based on my equipment and facilities," he said. "We're kind of restricted in terms of growth.

"I can't very quickly train more people. I don't have the infrastructure to handle more than I have. We're also competing with other universities to retain certified flight instructors."

Compounding the situation is a decision by the manufacturers of 50-seat regional jets to stop producing them as airlines switch to more fuel efficient 70- or 76-seat aircraft. If a small airport cannot attract enough travelers for the larger regional jets, they will lose commercial air service, according to Swelbar.

"Only 138 of 357 small and non-hub airports are supporting 70-seat service today," he said.



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Travel frequency also is an economic issue for smaller airports and the communities that support them.

Marty Lenss, director of The Eastern Iowa Airport, said airports need 10,000 enplanements (passengers boarding aircraft) annually or they stand to lose a minimum of \$1 million in federal Airport Improvement Program funding that comes from passenger user fees.

"If an airport cannot get its AIP entitlement funding, it's going to put stress on the local cities, counties and tax levies to fund that infrastructure," he said. "In my opinion, there is not a single greater issue facing the industry today."

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