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The Illinois congressman in charge of overseeing aviation matters in the House said Thursday he's not an opponent of the proposed south suburban airport near Peotone.

But he made it clear he's not a huge supporter of it, either.

"I view it as a state and local issue," said U.S. Rep. Jerry Costello (D-12th), of downstate Belleville, while in Chicago to tour safety improvements at Midway Airport.

Costello last week was named chairman of the House Aviation Subcommittee. When asked about the need for a third major airport to serve the Chicago region, Costello was noncommittal, saying it was more of a concern for the Federal Aviation Administration.

"Hopefully, at some point in time ... there is an agreement with state officials and local officials in the area to come up with a plan," Costello said. "Once that happens, the federal government and the Federal Aviation Administration can weigh in on this issue."

The airport planned by the state has been beset by squabbling among local officials as to who should manage the project. It also faces opposition from landowners who do not want to sell their property for the airport.

U.S. Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr. (D-2nd), of Chicago, said he did not take the comments from Costello seriously. Jackson is pushing for the airport to be built and managed by the private sector through his Abraham Lincoln National Airport Commission.

"Our proposal is privately financed and seeks no participation from the federal government," he said.

A representative for U.S. Rep. Jerry Weller (R-11th), of Morris, on Thursday did not return a message seeking comment. Weller's district includes the proposed airport's 4,100-acre footprint.

Joining Costello on his trip was U.S. Rep. Dan Lipinski (D-3rd), of Western Springs, who also was assigned a seat on the aviation subcommittee last week.

Lipinski, whose district includes Midway Airport, was harsher about the prospects for a new airport. He said he worries the airport will be waste of taxpayer money without an airline willing to fly out of it.

"The real big question for this airport is, will it be economically viable?" Lipinski said. "The big thing is getting a carrier to commit."

Accompanied by Costello, Lipinski got his first look at Midway's Emergency Materials Arresting Systems. Made of crushable concrete and foam, EMAS is installed at the ends of runways to stop planes from overruns.

The FAA is providing Chicago with \$30 million to prevent a repeat of the fatal December 2005 accident in which a Southwest Airlines plane skidded beyond the runway in a snowstorm -- crashing through a fence and killing a young boy riding in his family's car.

The end of the runway where Flight 1248 lost control was equipped with EMAS last year. The remaining runways will be finished this year.