

Des Moines Council SEPA questions 061126

1. Under this expansion proposal, the Port of Seattle will spend several million dollars to process and store Sustainable Aviation Fuel. For this year's state budget, the Port supported expenditure of about 43-million dollars on research and construction of SAF-related infrastructure. But it has become clear that widespread use of sustainable fuel is decades away.

Current annual consumption of aviation fuel in the United States is about 20 million gallons. But researchers at Washington State University estimated in May that production of SAF *might* reach two million gallons by 2030—but only if a number of variables aligned properly.

Our community is suffering significant air quality issues *now*, and those will only worsen with the growth in aircraft traffic the Port proposes. Why, then, did the Port Commission support such significant investment on a product whose market is so far from maturity—while opposing legislation (Sen. Orwall's SB 5652) that would have funded mitigation of adverse air quality impacts currently associated with operations at SEA?

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2. In 1997, the consulting firm H-O-K warned that increased air traffic from construction of a third runway would contribute to a cycle of economic blight in neighborhoods adjacent to the airport. H-O-K recommended that five cities—including Des Moines—receive subsidies to help offset losses in property tax revenues resulting from a decline in property values.

In light of the additional noise and pollution these expansion projects will generate, is it time for the Port to consider providing such compensation? We are aware the Port has long held such direct payments would violate the state constitution. The state solicitor general now says that is incorrect—that such expenditures are allowable when they are made “to carry out a fundamental government purpose.”

Is the Port prepared to revise its position and provide such assistance to the airport-impacted communities?

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3. The FAA has continued to use the outdated decibel-averaging measurement of 65 DNL as its threshold for designating high noise zones near airports. The Environmental Protection Agency actually says 55 DNL is the limit for safe noise levels outdoors. The World Health Organization's standard is now 40 decibels.

The FAA, in a noise policy review issued in 2023, acknowledged that "communities are not experiencing the benefits from newer, quieter technology and operations from quieter aircraft because of the substantial increase in aircraft operations over U.S. airspace." And the proposed airport expansion will add some 350 takeoffs and landings every day—with the daily average exceeding 15-hundred.

The Port positions itself as an environmental champion. Isn't it time your agency takes an aggressive public stand for a major overhaul of federal noise standards, rather than continuing to operate under rules that guarantee greater harm to people in the cities near the airport?

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4. Going back about 30 years, the Port has outfitted more than 9,000 homes with noise mitigation packages that we know as "Port packages." Many of those have failed and, at present, there is no money to repair those packages outside of a very small pilot program, under which the Port has yet to replace a single installation.

In any case, a large number of failed Port packages are in homes that are no longer within the federally designated high-noise envelope—so federal funds cannot be used to fix them. The Port of Seattle last session opposed legislation that would have addressed that problem using state money. Is the Port prepared to dedicate, on an annual basis, a portion of its own King County property tax levy funds so that these homeowners can finally start getting some relief?

2. Hazardous Air Pollutants

Hazardous air pollutants (HAPs) are regulated under the Clean Air Act because of their potential adverse effects on human health and the environment. HAPs are to be considered when any action is defined as "major" which according to the definition in the SEPA document would be "a new runway or terminal...."

SEA staff did not include an analysis of HAPs in the SEPA because they determined that the SAMP is not a "major action." The near-term projects include a new 19 gate terminal, so doesn't that make the SAMP a "major action"?

3. Traffic Analysis

The SEPA's traffic analysis averages daily traffic volumes. Anyone who lives and drives in the Seattle – Tacoma metro area knows that the only thing that really impacts how long it takes to get anywhere is "peak traffic" which is strongly correlated to the time of day. Why doesn't the SEPA include information on what the project growth at the airport will do to peak traffic volumes?

4. Projected Passenger Volumes at SEA

This year we have seen the addition of more non-stop flights out of Paine Field. We have also seen an increase in the daily flights out of Bellingham and the Tri-Cities and more daily flights planned for Wenatchee. Have the project growth numbers for passengers at SEA been updated to reflect the growth in these other markets?