

NEWS

The Flight Plan Project
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Port of Seattle and
Puget Sound Council
of Governments

AUGUST 1991

Senator Leo Thorsness recently replaced Senator Eleanor Lee on the Puget Sound Air Transportation Committee. Sen. Thorsness serves on both the State Air Transportation Commission and the Senate Transportation Committee. He is active in economic development and transportation issues.

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Public shapes air capacity alternatives

In May 1991, following months of study by its Options Subcommittee, the Puget Sound Air Transportation Committee (PSATC) adopted a list of alternatives for meeting the region's long-term need for additional air capacity.

An integral part of the effort was a series of public meetings to present the results of the analysis and receive comments on the Options Subcommittee's draft recommendations.

Citizen feedback was sought over a six-week period at four public meetings (one in Snohomish County, one in Pierce County, and two in King County) at which individuals and representatives of organizations and agencies were encouraged to express their concerns.

The meetings were announced in local newspapers. In addition, meeting notices were sent with copies of the draft recommendations to about 4,000 people on the PSATC's mailing list. As a result, over 1,200 people participated or wrote letters to the Subcommittee.

Public comments

Although the comments covered a wide range of concerns and issues, they fell into nine broad categories:

- Opposition to any expansion of Sea-Tac Airport.
- Support of a multiple airport system alternative, including Sea-Tac as a key component.
- Opposition to locating a supplemental regional airport at every site under consideration.
- Support for paying more attention to the impacts of any alternative on the surrounding residents and environment (particularly concerning noise and air pollution).
- Support for high-speed rail and demand management (policies such as pricing or regulatory techniques that encourage the use of larger planes, flights during non-peak hours, and diversion of passengers to other travel modes).
- Concern that the alternatives might be too short-sighted and should address the region's needs to at least 2050 instead of 2020.
- Skepticism regarding viability of the replacement airport alternative.
- Interest in looking at Whidbey Island Naval Air Station as a potential site. [Ed. note: The Committee will monitor this possibility since the Air Station is no longer being recommended for closure.]
- Support for the Remote Airport alternative at Moses Lake.

Copies of all written testimony along with transcripts of comments received at the public hearings were assembled into a two-volume document, which is available at several area libraries or the Puget Sound Council of Governments Information Center (call 464-7532 for more information).

Alternatives that may be feasible

The PSATC recognized the region's eventual need for three instrument runways that would be usable in all weather conditions. (Sea-Tac currently has two runways, but only one can be used in bad weather conditions.) After receiving public comments, the PSATC modified its recommendation of alternatives for further study and concluded that the following alternatives may represent feasible commercial air transportation solutions. All of them are envisioned as part of an integrated air and ground transportation system.

- Multiple Airport System (each alternative below incorporates demand management and new technology).
 - Sea-Tac with or without commuter runway plus regional airport with one runway.
 - Sea-Tac with or without commuter runway plus regional airport with one runway, expandable to two runways.
 - Sea-Tac with additional air carrier runway plus regional airport with one runway.
 - Sea-Tac with additional air carrier runway plus regional airport with one runway, expandable to two runways.

(In the Multiple Airport System alternatives, the supplemental regional airport would have service primarily to cities in the Pacific Northwest, California, and some national hub airports. The site search for a supplemental airport would be focused in Pierce and Snohomish counties, studying Arlington Airport, Paine Field, McChord Air Force Base, the Arlington/Stanwood search area, and the Fort Lewis/Spanaway search area as possibilities. Locations in other

counties would be considered only if no potential sites were found in Pierce and Snohomish Counties.)

- A new international airport replacing Sea-Tac.

- Sea-Tac in conjunction with the maximum feasible package of demand management techniques, new technologies, and alternative modes of transportation.

The Committee also requested further analysis of the potential use of Boeing Field with Sea-Tac (Close-in Remote Airport option), to determine whether operational changes at Boeing Field could provide increased air capacity. Earlier analysis by the Federal Aviation Administration and PSATC consultants concluded that increased air traffic interaction between Sea-Tac and Boeing Field would result in more congestion at Boeing Field and no net capacity gain for the region. However, if the airspace issue were resolved, the Committee could consider this an additional alternative for further study.

Alternatives that are not feasible

The following alternatives were *not* found to be feasible *stand-alone* solutions to the region's air transportation problem and so were not recommended for further study. However, with the exception of the Distant Remote Airport option, they all were included as *components* in the above list of alternatives that may be feasible.

- Sea-Tac: Base Case A (no major facility improvements at any Puget Sound airport) and Base Case B (short-term capital projects and policies that may be implemented by the Port under existing plans at Sea-Tac before the year 2000, possibly including a commuter runway), and the Expand Sea-Tac option, which

would add an air carrier runway roughly within current Port property. (It was found that no configuration of Sea-Tac could, by itself, provide sufficient capacity to meet the region's commercial air transportation needs through 2020.)

- Remote Airport (Distant): A remote airport system would couple Sea-Tac with a second airport located a long way from the population center. (This would entail very high costs while providing the least convenience for users because of the long travel time to reach the remote airport, even with a high-speed ground connection. Also, there was considerable doubt that the airlines would be willing to use the remote facility since it would place them at a competitive disadvantage compared to airlines remaining at Sea-Tac. It was determined that this option could be studied in the future only if the State (or some other entity) moves forward with planning for a high-speed rail system.)

- High Speed Rail: This system would couple Sea-Tac with a high-speed rail system (steel wheel or mag-lev) that could divert some short-haul airline service between Sea-Tac and Portland and Vancouver, thus providing capacity relief for the three airports. (It was estimated that a high-speed rail system could only divert 40,000 annual airline operations by 2020, compared to the capacity shortfall of 145,000 expected by that year. However, the PSATC strongly supports the proposed State effort to examine the feasibility of high-speed rail as a potentially important element of the region's transportation system in the next century, and it will encourage that effort.)

What now?

The next step in the project is detailed analysis of the alternatives, in

order to develop and select a preferred course of action for meeting the long-term air transportation needs of the Puget Sound region. The PSATC will oversee the technical analysis, with consultant support by P&D Aviation assisted by Mestre Greve Associates for noise and air quality studies and Parametrix, Inc. for the environmental impact statement.

The analysis will be based on level of service, airspace capacity, facility and access requirements, timing, economic and financial implications, investment requirements and feasibility of implementation. It also will include a detailed environmental assessment, with at least four public hearings.

The Committee's final selection of a preferred course of action will be made in early 1992.

FUTURE MEETINGS (public invited)

Wed., Sept. 11, 8:30 a.m.

Agenda: Operational issues

Wed., Oct. 16, 8:30 a.m.

Agenda: Economic analysis

Thurs., Oct. 24, 8:30 a.m.

Agenda: Institutional analysis

Locations to be announced

If you usually receive the Sea-Tac Forum, but not the PSATC News, and would like to be on the PSATC mailing list, please contact Kathleen Drew at 439-7734.

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