

CHAPTER 10: PUBLIC PROCESS

Public involvement was an important part of Phase III of the Long-Term Air Transportation Study. The Aviation Planning Council considered both technical findings and public input when developing recommendations. The public outreach process was extensive, and included multiple approaches designed to capture input and reactions of organized stakeholder groups as well as the general public from all areas of the state, including those who have passionate and diverse opinions about aviation, as well as from those who may be less involved, but who will be directly impacted by changes to Washington's aviation system. The following outreach opportunities were available during LATS Phase III:

- Regional Public Meetings – July 2008 and March 2009
- Electronic Town Halls – August 2008 and November 2009
- Online Survey – March 2009
- Briefings to organizations – upon request, ongoing throughout Phase III
- Media Releases
- E-Newsletters
- Aviation Planning Council Meetings/Workshops
- LATS Project Website – www.wsdot.wa.gov/Aviation/lats

Consistent with previous phases of LATS, electronic communication played an important role in the Phase III public outreach program and enabled the Aviation Planning Council to obtain feedback from all areas of the state. Two 60-minute Electronic Town Halls were held online via a moderated session. Key advantages of the Electronic Town Halls include improved sample representation, the ability to present complex information in graphic form with narration from the moderator, and a live question and answer session.

WSDOT also conducted an online survey to assess public opinion on the issues discussed by the Aviation Planning Council during LATS Phase III. The online survey provided the Council with statistically valid feedback from a representative sample of Washington residents and provided an opportunity to cross check findings from the electronic town halls and regional public meetings.

The LATS website was a primary means of sharing project information with the public. The website provided ongoing updates about the project

including links to Aviation Planning Council meeting materials and summaries, links to working papers, presentation materials, and reports. WSDOT Aviation News Service, a 4,000-person list serve maintained by WSDOT Aviation, served as a timely tool for ongoing communications with the public. List serve members received project updates and announcements about Aviation Planning Council meetings and public meetings.

The following is a summary of key findings from the Regional Public Meetings, Electronic Town Halls, and Online Survey. A detailed summary report for each event is available online at www.wsdot.wa.gov/Aviation/lats.

Regional Public Meetings

The Aviation Planning Council and WSDOT Aviation hosted regional public meetings in July 2008 and March 2009. The first set of regional meetings was held on July 22, 2008 at the Future of Flight Aviation Center at Paine Field in Mukilteo (Western Washington) and on July 24, 2008 at the Wenatchee Convention Center (Eastern Washington). The purpose of the July 2008 meetings was to gather public comment on draft statewide aviation policies developed by the Aviation Planning Council to address seven major issue areas: capacity, land use, environment, stewardship, economic vitality, safety, and mobility. The Council based its final recommendations for the Aviation System Plan on these policy recommendations. Approximately 48 people attended the Western Washington meeting and four people attended the Eastern Washington meeting. The meetings coincided with a 21-day public comment period which extended from July 10-31, 2008. Twenty-one comment letters were submitted by e-mail, fax, or mail.

The second set of regional meetings was held on March 24, 2009 at WSDOT Aviation Headquarters in Olympia (Western Washington) and the Ramada Inn in Spokane (Eastern Washington). Approximately 11 people attended the Western Washington meeting and 6 attended the Eastern Washington meeting. The purpose of the March 2009 meetings was to gather public comment on 26 draft alternative strategies designed to address key issues facing the Washington State Aviation System in the areas of capacity, stewardship, and land use. The Aviation Planning Council considered public comment on the draft alternative strategies as it developed its System Plan Recommendations. The meetings coincided with a 45-day public comment period which extended from March 4 – April 17, 2009. A total of 192 comment workbooks were submitted and 46 comment letters were submitted by e-mail, fax, or mail.

Key Findings

July 2008 Regional Meetings

Participants were asked to indicate their level of support for each of the proposed draft statewide aviation policies – support, neutral, or against. Most participants indicated support for the draft statewide aviation policies. Written comments submitted in person at the regional meetings and during the comment period provide additional insight into response to the statewide aviation policies.

A number of questions were raised about the forecasting model and the accuracy of the capacity data provided. There was also a feeling expressed by a number of participants that the capacity policies lacked specific recommendations to address how to meet future capacity needs.

A number of comments expressed the opinion that community and environmental impacts such as noise, air pollution, and health impacts need to be better addressed in considering aviation capacity issues. Others commented that the draft policies were too focused on the needs of aviation and airports, and not on the needs of people and communities. Others encouraged the Aviation Planning Council to consider policies that promote more sustainable practices, and to consider non-aviation modes of travel.

Wenatchee meeting participants addressed the role of airports in responding to emergencies and encouraged special consideration for airports that serve an emergency rescue role during natural and manmade disasters.

March 2009 Regional Meetings

Participants were asked to provide comments by completing a comment workbook in which they were asked to indicate their level of support for each draft alternative strategy and provide written comments.

Capacity Constraints Anticipated by 2030

There were only three strategies where there was clear consensus for this issue area, which are listed below:

- Invest in advanced aviation technology (strong support)
- Use demand management techniques (strong opposition)
- Redistribute demand to nearby airports (strong opposition)

When looking at all responses, opinion was divided on the state expanding airports with capacity constraints, and the state constructing new airports. Support was greater for these strategies outside of the Puget Sound region.

Written comments provide additional insight into response to the statewide aviation policies. Several participants had questions about the accuracy of SeaTac capacity calculations. Concern was expressed about expansion of service at Paine Field and the Olympia Airport. Participants encouraged the Council to explore non-aviation alternatives to relieve capacity for in-state travel and alternatives to airport expansion or new airport construction. Some expressed concerns that the LATS process and draft alternative strategies are biased toward airport expansion. Others expressed concern that the process should be subject to an environmental review process.

Capacity – Airport Closures

Participants supported the strategy of authorizing expanded state ownership to forestall airport closures. Opinion was divided on the state initiating an educational campaign, adding assurances to the state airport grant program, and introducing new legislation to prevent airport closures. The majority of Puget Sound respondents opposed these strategies, but support was greater in other areas of the state. Several Puget Sound area respondents expressed concern that an educational campaign would be a lobbying effort for airports and airplane owners, and would not focus on protecting communities that are negatively affected by noise and other negative aviation-related impacts. Accountability was the key reason for those who supported adding assurances to the state airport grant program. For those who were against this strategy, the most common reason cited was the objection to using state funds to support airports. Those in support of introducing new legislation to prevent airport closures commented on the importance of airport preservation. Those against this strategy felt that closure decisions should be determined by the owner, and that the free market should be allowed to operate.

Capacity – Loss of Service at Small Community Airports

Participants indicated moderate support for the state encouraging local negotiations between small communities and airlines. Support was greater for this strategy outside of the Puget Sound region.

Half of all respondents opposed providing local, state and/or federal support to small communities to retain air carrier service. However, while there was strong opposition to this strategy in the Puget Sound region, there was stronger support elsewhere in the state. Those against this strategy expressed the opinion that the free market should be allowed to

work without government intervention. The importance of creating economic development in smaller communities and the protecting state's infrastructure were common themes among supporters of this strategy.

Stewardship

There was consensus on several of the stewardship alternative strategies:

- Prioritize system investments (strong support)
- Improve instrument approach capabilities (strong support)
- Establish incentive programs to remove obstructions and enhance safety (strong support)
- Install weather reporting equipment (strong support)
- Improve management of airport pavement (moderate support)
- Establish a program for landing aids and aircraft turnarounds at small airports (moderate support)
- Establish a revolving loan program (moderate support)
- Focus on having projects “shovel ready” (neutral opinion)

Opinion was divided on the state establishing a grant assurances program and increasing its investment in planning. Accountability was the key reason for supporting the state establishing a grant assurances program. For those who are against it, the most common reason cited is the objection to the use of state funds to support airports. For those in support of increasing the state's investment in planning, they saw it as a way to promote system stewardship. Several Puget Sound area respondents expressed concern that this strategy would enable the State to buffer local politicians from controversial projects.

Some participants expressed concern that the alternative strategies are too focused on general aviation issues.

Land Use

When looking at all responses, opinion was divided on all of the proposed land use strategies. In general, those who responded within the Puget Sound area were more likely to oppose the land use strategies while support was greater in other areas of the state. The responses of participants from outside of the Puget Sound region were had more similarities to what we learned from the online survey and E-Town Halls with regard to land use.

Those in support of the state coordinating the planning process with local and regional agencies expressed the opinion that local government has a poor record when it comes to addressing land use/airport issues. Others stated that coordination leads to better decisions. Those opposing this strategy expressed concern that this strategy is biased toward protection of the aviation system and against community interests. Others said local government should be in charge of land use decision-making.

Those in support of adding assurances to the state airport grant program to require recipients to adopt comprehensive plan policies and consistent development regulations to discourage incompatible development near airports, they expressed the opinion that the strategy would increase accountability. They also indicated that this strategy helps insulate airports from local political pressure. For those against this strategy, the most common reason cited is the objection to the use of state funds to support airports. Others cautioned that assurances need to be reasonable, enforceable, and permanent and commented that local government should be in charge of land use decision-making.

Comments were similar in response to the state developing funding eligibility criteria and to the state strengthening legislation to protect public investments in airport. Those in support of these strategies indicated that a state role is needed based on the opinion that local government has a poor record when it comes to addressing land use/airport issues. Others expressed concern that funding typically favors airports and airlines, and not communities who may oppose an action. Participants again commented that local government should be in charge of land use decision-making.

Those in support of the state requiring land use certification commented that the language should be stronger. Those against this strategy commented that it favors the needs of airports over community concerns. Others commented that this strategy adds too many layers of bureaucracy.

Participants also expressed concern that the land use strategies place too much emphasis on the needs of airports and not the neighborhood impacts of airport expansion.

Electronic Town Halls

The Aviation Planning Council and WSDOT Aviation hosted Electronic Town Halls on August 26, 2008 and November 18, 2008. Eighty-one Washington residents participated in the first Electronic Town Hall and 115 participated in the second Electronic Town Hall. The Electronic Town Halls were conducted in partnership with Knowledge Networks which recruited participants from KnowledgePanel®, a probability-based panel including those without computers or access to the Internet.

The Electronic Town Halls were led by a moderator who presented background information on the State aviation system information. Participants were asked to respond to multiple choice, scaled, and open ended response questions and invited to submit questions about the aviation system to the moderator. The key advantages of the Electronic Town Hall tool is that it allows for improved sample representation, the ability to present complex information in graphic form with narration from the moderator, and a live question and answer session.

Key Findings

Electronic Town Hall 1 – August 2008

The first Electronic Town Hall elicited feedback on the importance of aviation benefits, the role of state government in aviation, and potential ways the state could address future aviation capacity needs in Washington State.

Importance of Aviation Benefits

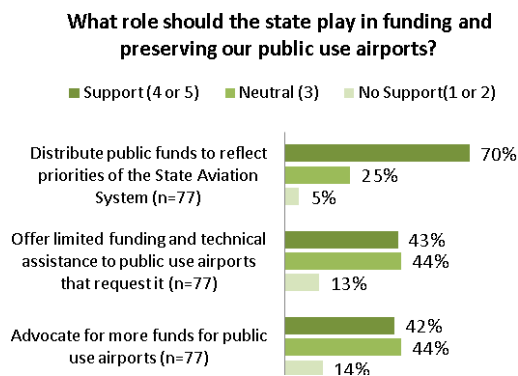
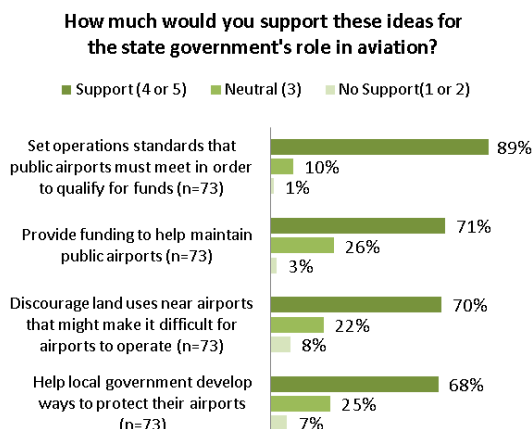
Movement of freight and goods (93%), response to wildfires (92%), connecting Washington to global markets (91%), and search and rescue operations (90%) were viewed by participants as Very Important or Somewhat Important aviation benefits. Participants also viewed jobs (84%), connecting Washington's communities (76%), and meeting the needs of small communities (70%) as Very Important or Somewhat Important aviation benefits.

Role of State Government

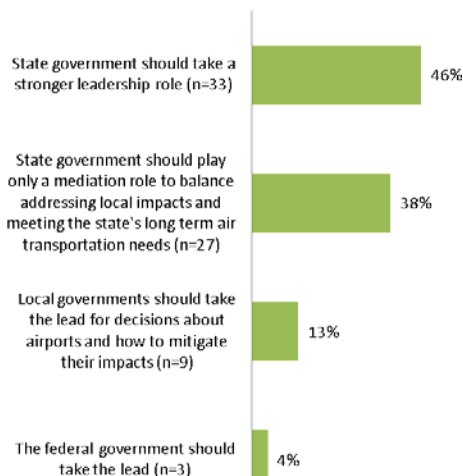
There was strong consensus among participants that state government should set standards for public airports in order to qualify for funds, with 89% of participants supporting this role for state government. Participants also indicated support for a state government role in providing funding to help maintain airports (71%), discouraging incompatible land uses near

airports (70%), and helping local governments protect airports (68%). Less than 10% of participants indicated little or no support for these roles.

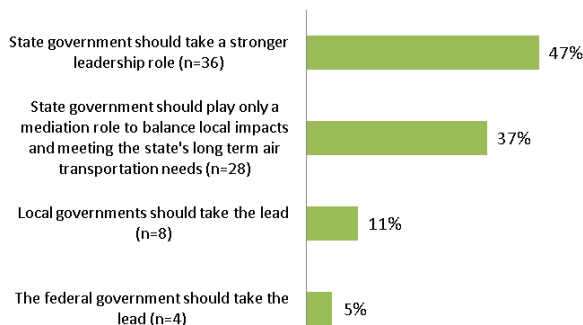
Seventy percent of participants supported the state prioritizing funding to reflect the priorities of the State Aviation System. Participants were moderately supportive of the state offering funding and technical assistance to public use airports as a preservation tool. Forty-three percent of participants indicated support for the state offering funding and technical assistance to public use airports, while 44% expressed a neutral opinion about this role for state government. Participants also indicated moderate support for the state advocating for more funds for public use airports. Forty-two percent of participants indicated support for the state advocating for more funds for public airports while 44% expressed a neutral opinion about this role for state government.



When it comes to expanding existing airports, how should decisions be made?



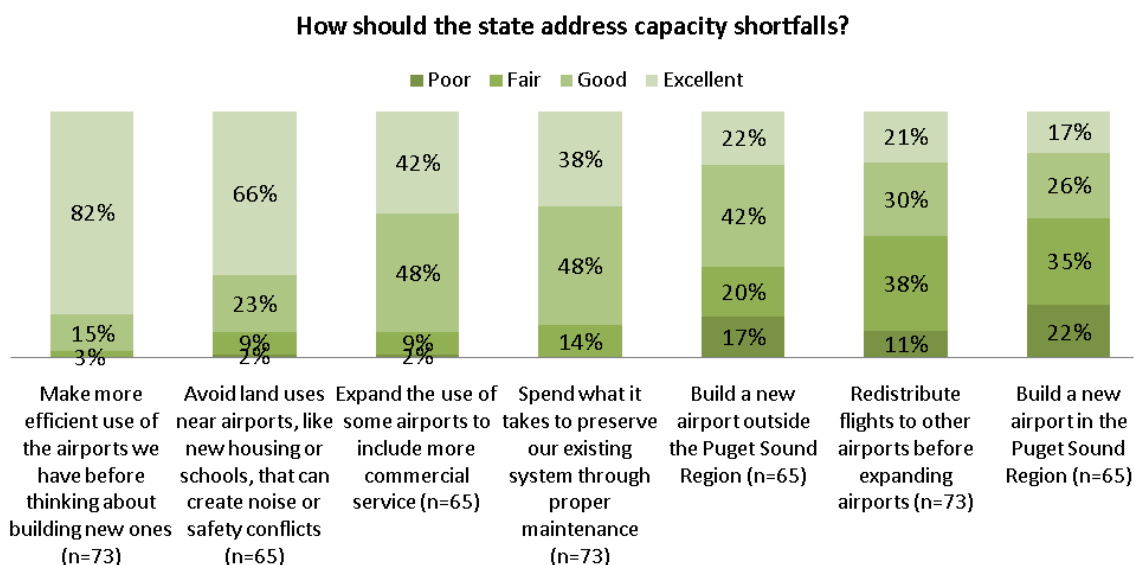
When it comes to building or finding a location for new airports, how should decisions be made?



Addressing Future Aviation Capacity Needs

Participants were most supportive of the state taking a leadership role in making decisions about airport expansion and about building or finding a location for new airports. Participants were also supportive of the state playing a mediation role. Participants expressed limited support for local government taking the lead in decision-making about expanding or building new airports. Participants were least supportive of the federal government taking the lead in decisions about airport expansion or building new airports.

Participants indicated a preference for making use of the existing system before adding new capacity. Participants also indicated support for avoiding incompatible land uses near airports, for expanding the use of some airports to include more commercial service, and preserving the existing system through proper maintenance. Opinion was divided about the idea of redistributing flights to other airports. Participants were least supportive of building a new airport in the Puget Sound region as a way to ease capacity shortfalls.

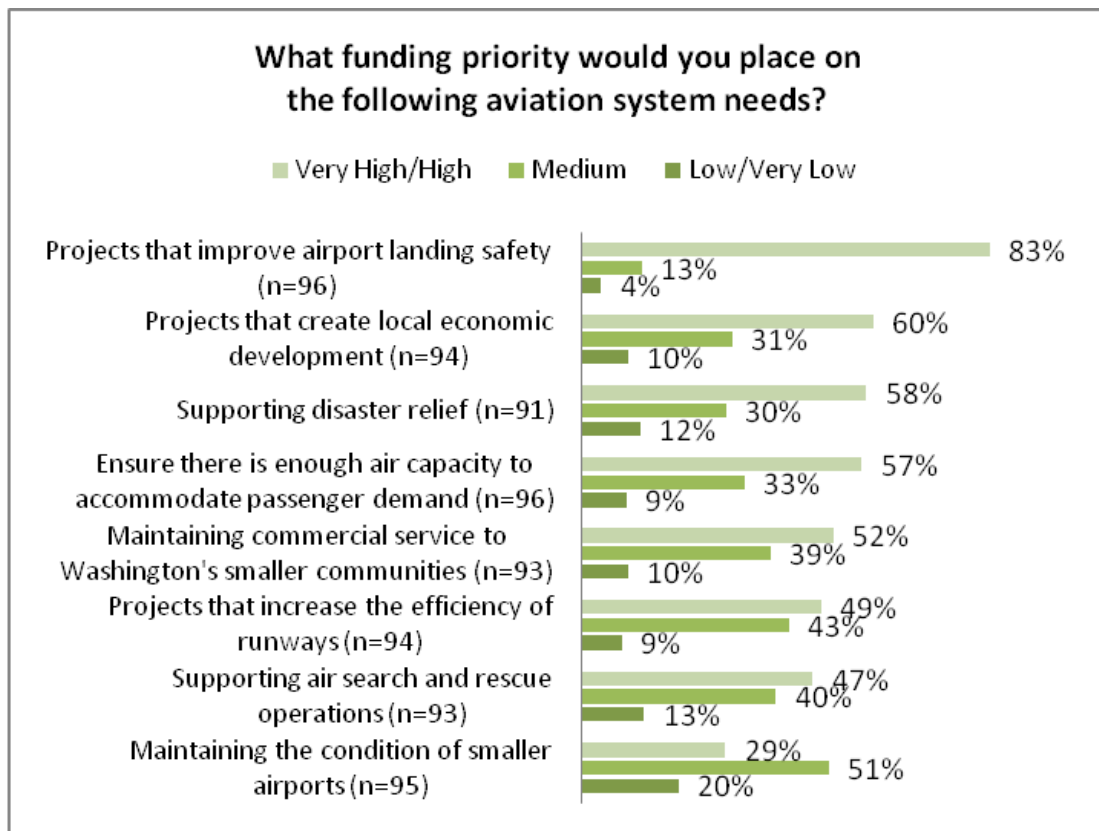


Electronic Town Hall 2 – November 2008

The second Electronic Town Hall elicited feedback on funding priorities for various aviation system needs, level of support for various ways of preserving Washington’s airports, and potential ways to address future capacity needs. The Electronic Town Halls were conducted in partnership with Knowledge Networks, which recruited participants from its panel of Washington residents.

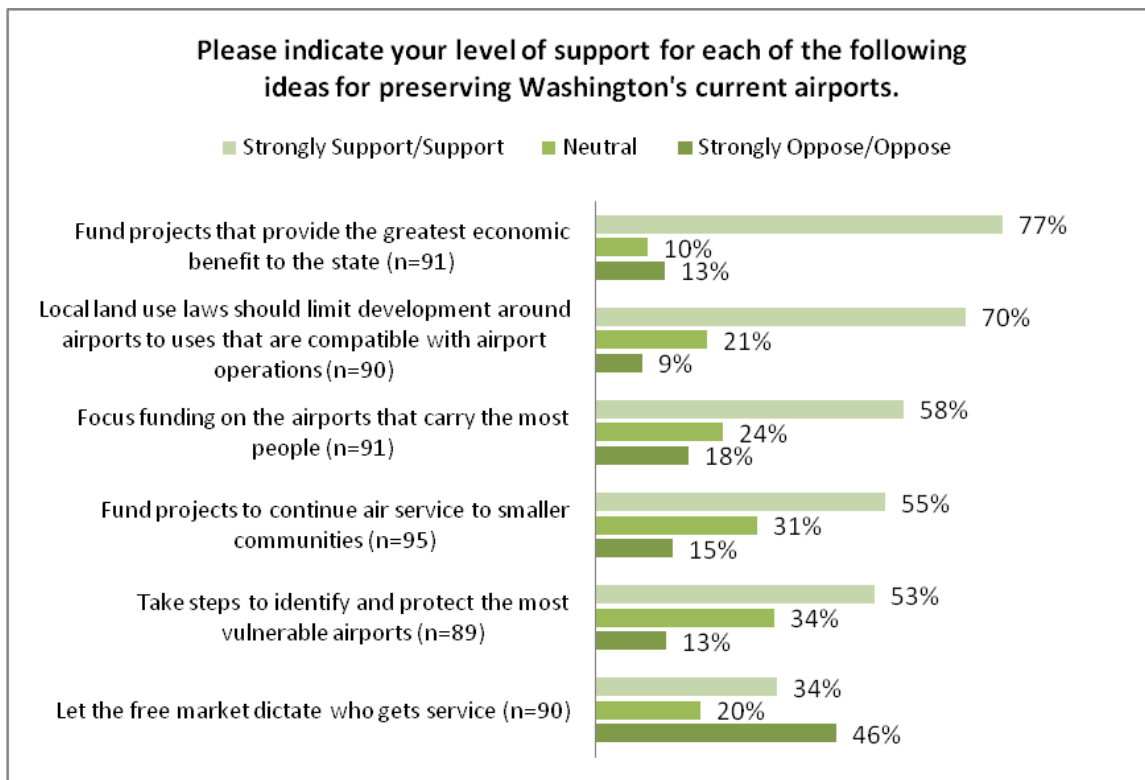
Funding Priorities

More than half of participants identified improving airport landing safety (83%), creating local economic development (60%), supporting disaster relief (58%), meeting passenger capacity demand (57%), and maintaining service to smaller communities (52%) as top funding priorities. Participants outside of the Puget Sound region were significantly more likely to view economic development and maintaining service to smaller communities as the highest priority aviation system needs. Participants within the Puget Sound region were significantly more likely to view ensuring there is enough air capacity to accommodate passenger demand and improving airport landing safety as the highest priority needs.



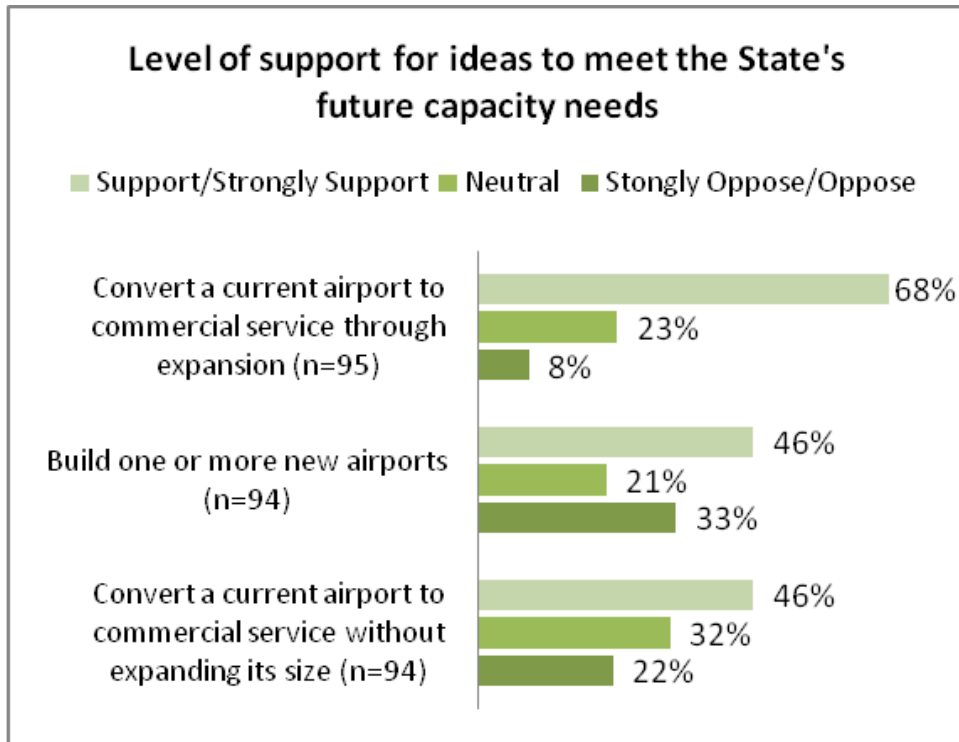
Preserving Washington's Airports

Participants were most supportive of funding projects that provide the greatest economic benefit to the state (77%) and limiting incompatible land uses around airports (70%). More than half of the participants supported focusing funding on the airports that carry the most people (58%), funding projects to continue air service to smaller communities (55%), and taking steps to protect the most vulnerable airports (53%). Participants were least supportive of letting the free market decide who gets service.

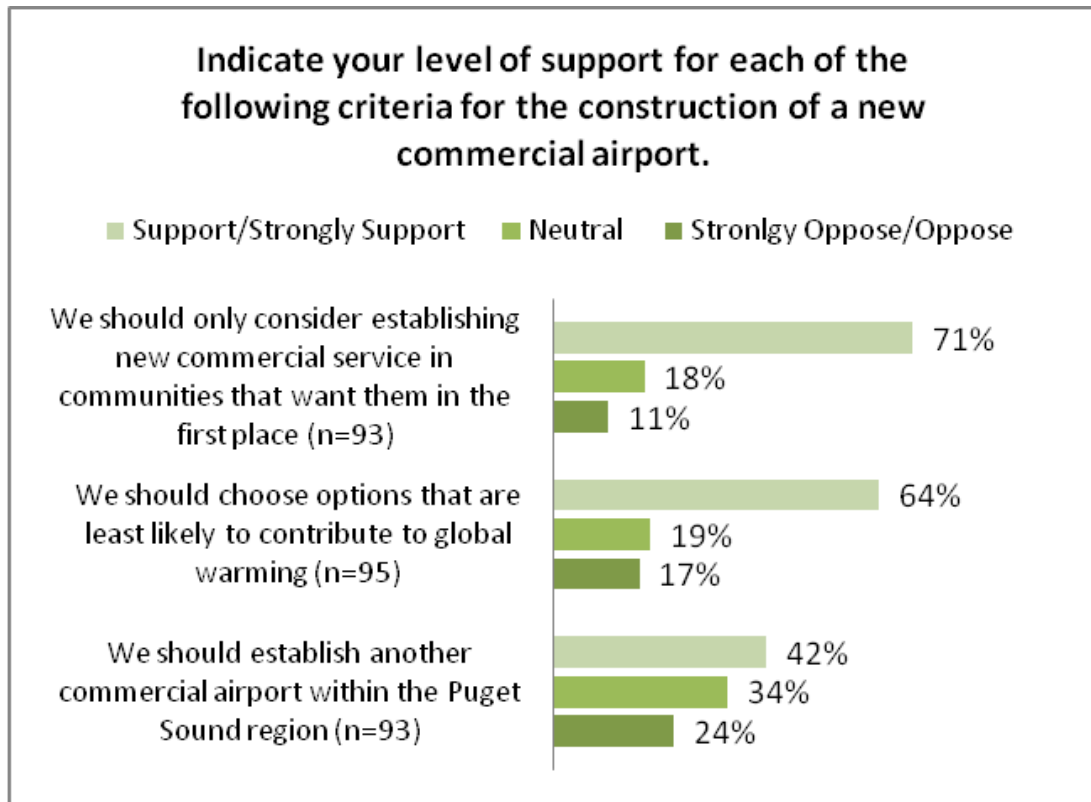


Addressing Future Aviation Capacity Needs

Participants were most supportive of converting a current airport to commercial service through expansion as a means to meet the State's future capacity needs. Participants living outside of the Puget Sound region were more likely to support this idea than those within the Puget Sound region. Opinion was divided on the idea of building a new airport as a means to meet the State's future capacity needs. While 46% supported this idea, 33% opposed it. Opinion was also divided on the idea of converting an existing airport without expansion as a means to meet future capacity needs. While 46% supported this idea, 32% were neutral, and 22% were opposed.



When asked to indicate the level of support for criteria for constructing a new commercial airport, participants were most supportive of only considering establishing commercial service in communities where there is existing support (71%). Participants also supported choosing options least likely to contribute to global warming (64%). Opinion was divided about establishing another airport in the Puget Sound Region. While 42% of participants were supportive of this criterion, 24% were opposed. Another 34% of participants indicated a neutral opinion.



Participants were most supportive of avoiding environmentally sensitive areas (56%) and having excess capacity to provide for future growth (54%) as criteria for building a new commercial airport. Participants had divided opinions on serving the largest number of customers, providing the quickest access to the largest number of customers, and helping to build local economies. Participants who live inside the Puget Sound region were more likely to give high weight to the criterion of locating a new airport near a highway than those who live outside the Puget Sound region.

Online Survey

The Aviation Planning Council and WSDOT Aviation conducted an online survey from April 3-17, 2009 to gather feedback from Washington residents on issues relating to aviation system funding and meeting future aviation capacity needs. The survey also presented an opportunity to cross-check findings from the regional public meetings and Electronic Town Halls.

This statistically valid survey was conducted in partnership with Knowledge Networks, which recruited participants using KnowledgePanel®, a probability-based panel used for academic and public policy research. Participants were randomly drawn from the 1,300+ panelists in the State of Washington. The panel was recruited by a traditional random digit dialing (RDD) technology and consists of both Internet-connected households and those without internet connections. Knowledge Networks provides internet access to those who do not have it. Knowledge Networks invited 1,322 Washington residents to complete the survey. In total, 938 surveys were completed for a 71 percent completion rate.

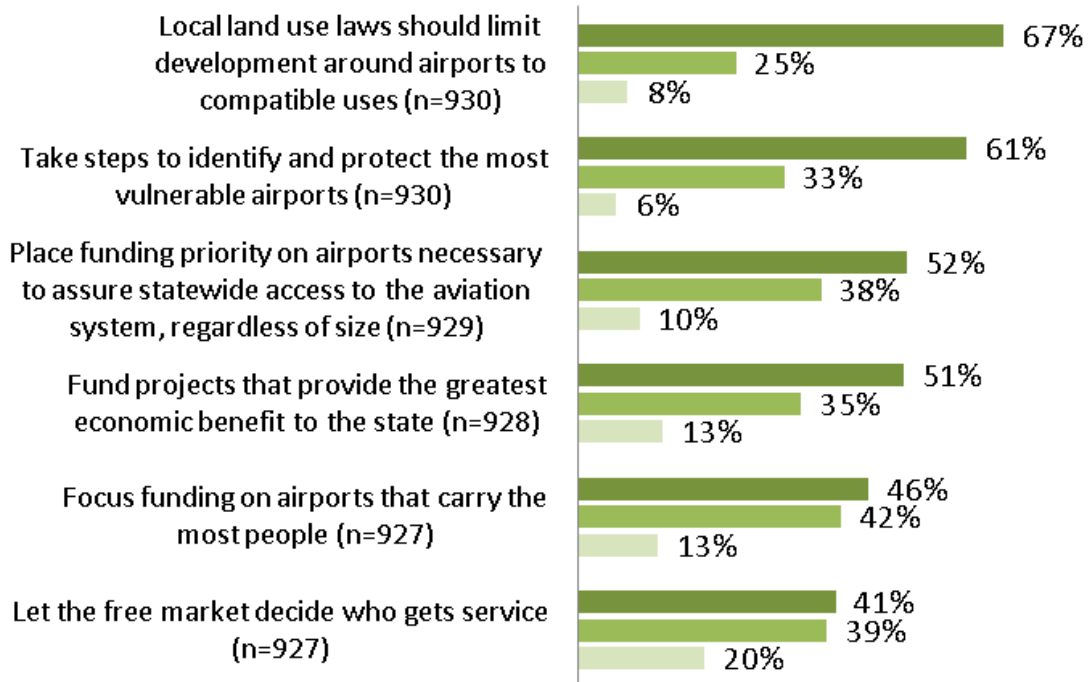
Key Findings

Airport Closures

Because airport closures are one of the key issues facing Washington's aviation system, participants were asked to indicate their level of support for ideas to address the decreasing number of airports in Washington State. At least half of the respondents agree (somewhat to strongly) that local land use should limit development (67%), that there be active steps to identify the most vulnerable airports (61%), and that a funding priority be placed on airports necessary for statewide access regardless of size (52%), and to focus funding on projects that provide the greatest economic benefit (51%). Just under half (46%) support the idea of placing a funding priority on airports that carry the most people while 41% support the idea of letting the free market dictate which airports remain in service. Respondents in the Central Puget Sound Region were more likely to support a funding priority for airports that carry the most people.

Support for the following ideas for addressing the decreasing number of airports in Washington State

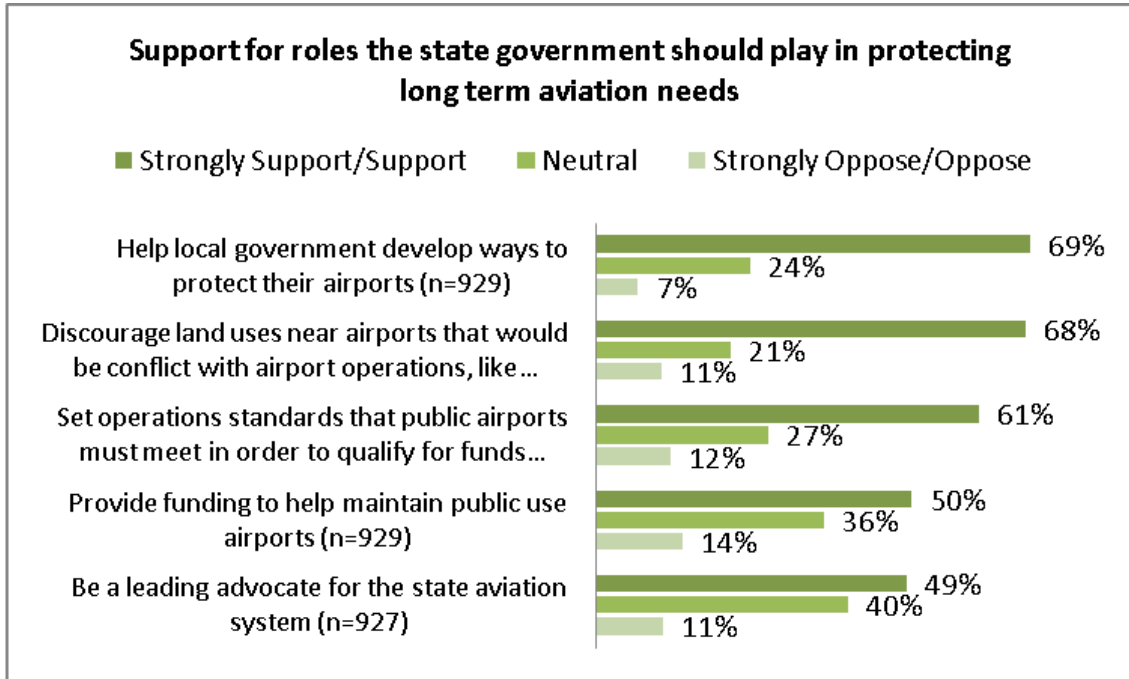
■ Strongly Support/Support ■ Neutral ■ Strongly Oppose/Oppose



Although the results cannot be compared statistically, it should be noted that participants in the Electronic Town Halls agreed with the online participants in strongly supporting local land use laws, but the Electronic Town Hall participants provided more support for funding projects that provide the greatest economic benefit. Electronic Town Hall participants also provided less support for taking steps to identify vulnerable airports and to fund projects for continued air service to smaller communities than did the online survey respondents.

Role of State Government

Overall at least half or more of respondents support all the roles proposed for the state to protect the long term air transportation needs. The roles of helping local government develop ways to protect their airports (69%) and discouraging incompatible land uses near airports (68%) received the most support.

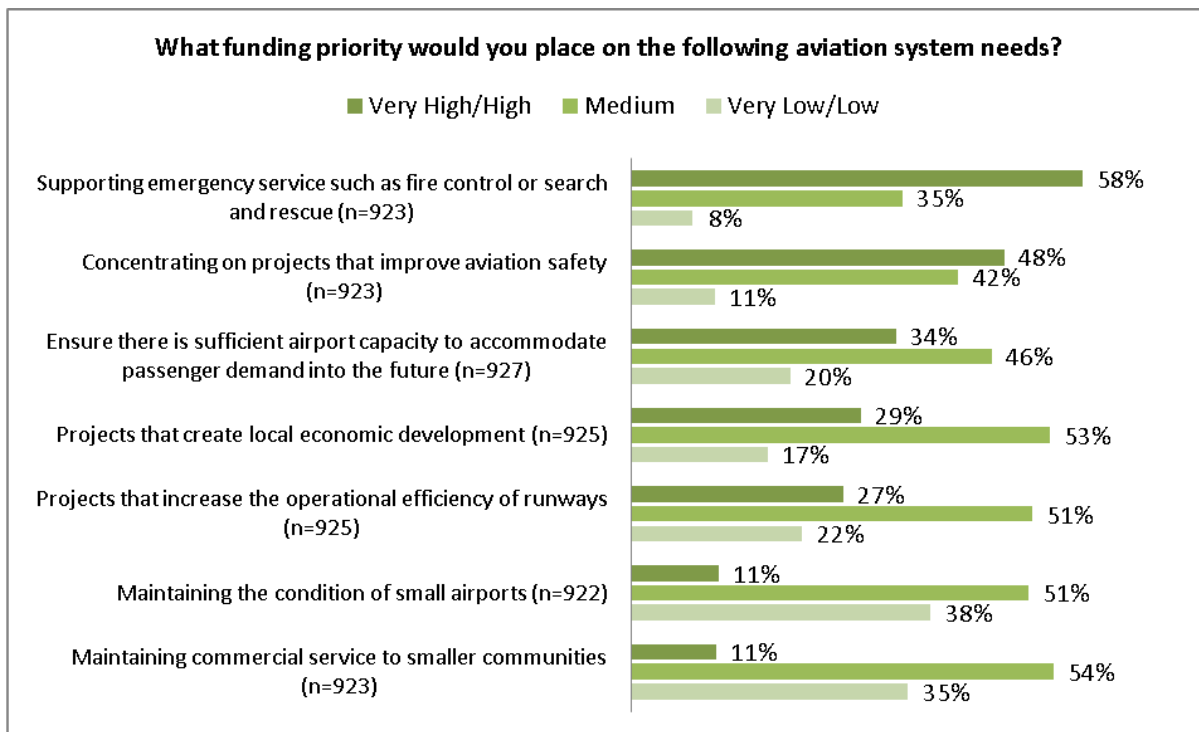


Funding Priorities for Aviation

More than half of respondents placed a high funding priority on supporting emergency service such as fire control (58%) and nearly half of respondents placed a high funding priority on concentrating on projects that improve aviation safety (48%). Respondents placed a medium funding priority on ensuring there is sufficient airport capacity to accommodate passenger demand into the future (46%). At least a third of respondents indicated a low priority for maintaining the condition of small airports (38%) and for supporting commercial service to smaller communities (35%). Respondents in the Central Puget Sound Region were more likely to give higher priority to ensuring that there is sufficient airport capacity to accommodate passenger demand.

Whereas online survey respondents gave the highest priority to supporting emergency services, Electronic Town Hall participants placed a higher priority on improving airport landing safety and creating local economic development higher funding priorities.

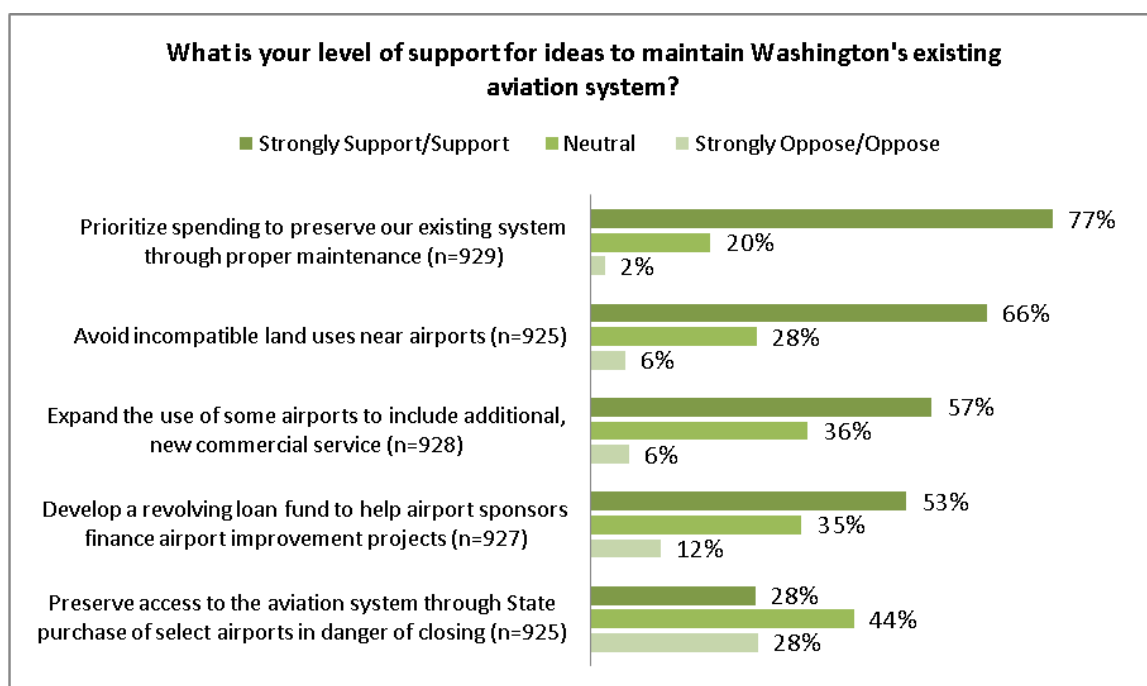
When asked to choose which priority should be the highest, respondents gave the highest priority to supporting emergency service. The lowest priority was for maintaining commercial service to smaller communities. Again, this is different from the Electronic Town Hall participants, who indicated that projects that create local economic development and ensuring there is enough air capacity to accommodate passengers should be the highest funding priorities. Both groups agree that increasing the efficiency of runways and maintaining the condition of smaller airports should be given low priority when making funding decisions.



Preserving Washington's Existing Aviation System

When considering ways to maintain Washington's existing aviation system, at least half of respondents support all the proposals, except the proposal to preserve access to the aviation system through State purchase of select airports that are in danger of closing. Almost a third (28%) of respondents opposed this idea of maintaining the aviation system.

Electronic Town Hall participants were not asked about prioritizing spending to preserve the existing system through proper maintenance, but they had similar levels of support for avoiding incompatible land uses and expanding the use of airports to include more commercial service.



Meeting Future Capacity Needs

Almost half (46% or higher) of respondents support all the proposals for meeting future capacity needs, except to build new airports. The strongest support was given to looking first at ways of making more efficient use of existing airports before thinking about building new airports (89%), to increasing the capacity of existing airports through investments in advanced aviation technology (74%), and to moving some types of services to other airports (72%). Participants were least supportive of building one or more new airports to meet future capacity needs. Just 18% of respondents supported this idea.

Electronic Town Hall participants indicated similar levels of support for converting current airports to commercial service with and without expansion; however Electronic Town Hall participants indicated a lot more support (46%) for building one or more new airports.



At least half of the respondents support requiring extensive citizen involvement in planning for new aviation capacity (57%), creating an independent local group to make decisions on how to address noise and other environmental impacts (56%), and creating a non-partisan state commission to make decisions about where to place new aviation capacity (52%). Participants were least supportive of giving new authority to regional transportation agencies and giving the State authority to conduct a siting analysis in the absence of a local sponsor. Electronic Town Hall participants indicated similar levels of support for these proposals.

