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Dear ChatGPT,

I need your advice. I was talking to a resident today at a candidate forum for Port of Seattle Commission and State Legislature. The resident lives near Sea-Tac Airport and has been vocal about reducing flights, something we support. She expressed appreciation in hearing that the Port of Seattle and state electeds are both eager to site a new airport somewhere in the near future. As most people do, the resident was enthusiastic because they interpreted that as an effort to reduce (or at least slow the growth of) flights.

Unfortunately, both the FAA and PSRC have made it clear since 2012 that will not happen. Every stakeholder has said that Sea-Tac will always reach its full capacity -regardless- of what happens anywhere else. Because there is so much demand.

Here's the problem. Like most people, they simply refused to believe it. This a very common response. The resident insisted, angrily, "...of course it will ease pressure here if you build another airport. It's just like building a new lane on a highway..."

I didn't want to make her angrier, but traffic planners have told our city many times that adding a new lane does -not- ease traffic. The traffic simply expands to fill up the space. Besides, I am not sure that the same metaphor works for roads as for air.

1. If I'm wrong, please tell me how? Don't be shy.

2. Can you suggest ways to explain this in a non-controversial manner? It's actually my group's mission to do what she wants. But it is also our mission to explain the situation accurately so that we don't keep pursuing strategies which distract from providing the relief she deserves. In other words, we feel it is counter-productive to simply let people keep advocating for things that won't help them.

But what we've found is that it's like trying to explain why steering against the skid is a bad idea. It's so counter-intuitive people not only refuse to believe it. They get angry.

Can you help? Feel free to push back aggressively.

Short answer: you're not wrong.

- **What the planning/forecast work says:** PSRC's Regional Aviation Baseline Study projects demand roughly doubling by 2050, leaving a region-wide gap even **after** planned SEA projects. In plain English: the system needs more capacity somewhere, but SEA still runs at/near its own ceiling either way.

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- **Current decisions reflect that:** The FAA just approved SEA's near-term SAMP projects specifically to meet forecast demand (not to shrink it).
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- **Second-airport process:** The state's CACC concluded existing airports can't absorb the need; only a new "greenfield" airport would add enough additional capacity—and likely not before 2050. That's about growing the pie, not lowering SEA below capacity.
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- **Why that feels counter-intuitive:** On highways, "induced demand" is well-documented; new lanes quickly fill. Aviation isn't identical, but the system behaves similarly: add capacity and airlines/consumers use it—SEA remains full because it's the dominant hub in a huge catchment. □cite□turn0search4□turn0search9□turn0news48□

How to explain it without a fight

1. **Two truths at once (non-zero-sum):** "Building capacity elsewhere can be good for the region **and** still leave SEA full. New capacity mainly decides where future growth goes, not whether SEA shrinks."
2. **Restaurant analogy (less charged than roads):** "SEA is the city's busiest restaurant. Even if we open another great spot across town, the original keeps a line out the door because of location, connections, and habits. The new place serves additional diners; it doesn't empty the old one."
3. **Time horizon reality check:** "Even supporters of a new airport say it's a multi-decade project. So it can't deliver near-term relief in neighborhoods today."
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4. **Neutral language that validates her goal:** Start with agreement: "I want fewer impacts here, too." Pivot to accuracy: "The planners' numbers show SEA runs at capacity either way." □cite□turn1search15□ Offer a path: "So we're pushing the things that do move the needle locally."

What to push now that actually helps locals

- **Quieter operations/technology and transparency:** procedure design, fleet mix reporting, and real community metrics (noise/UFP monitoring, public dashboards). (SAMP context + FAA FONSI shows near-term ops growth is planned—so fight for mitigation baked in.) □cite□turn0search11□turn0search6□
- **Home + school mitigation where allowed, and land-use protections.**
- **Honest constraints:** curfews or access limits are tightly restricted by federal law (ANCA/Part 161). Setting expectations here avoids false hopes.
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A 30-second script you can use

"I'm with you on reducing impacts here. The region's own study says air travel demand is doubling; SEA stays full even if we add capacity elsewhere. A second airport mostly decides *where new growth goes*—it doesn't turn SEA down. That's why we're fighting for the things that **do** cut impacts in our neighborhoods now: tougher mitigation, cleaner/quieter operations, and real monitoring with accountability." □cite□turn1search0□turn1search15□

You were doing great until that last bit. :D Those reasonable responses are things the Port and industry agree on. We know they can do a *lot* better. But the facts you mentioned concerning capacity do not lie.

Unfortunately, it's tough because our own electeds keep pushing it. What we find annoying is that they are careful *not* to suggest it will make this person's life any better. But by leaving the nuance out, people automatically assume something else.

How do we explain something that nuanced? ie. "If another community chooses another airport? Fantastic. But your electeds should not be implying that it will help *you*."

Core message (repeatable)

"Regional capacity ≠ neighborhood relief."

A second airport can help the *region* handle growth; it doesn't turn Sea-Tac down.

15-second doorstep line

"Another airport may be great for the *region*. But the planners' own numbers say Sea-Tac still runs full. So unless someone shows you the policy that actually *reduces operations over your house*, don't assume it helps here."

45-second town-hall version

1. **Validate:** "I want less noise here, too."
2. **Split the questions:** "There's the *regional* question—where future flights go—and the *local* question—what flies over us."
3. **Reality:** "New capacity elsewhere mostly decides where *new growth* goes. Sea-Tac still runs at its ceiling."
4. **Your takeaway:** "So ask for concrete, local relief—things that change what you feel here—not just headlines about a distant airport."

Replace the highway metaphor

Use **restaurants**, not roads: "Opening a new restaurant across town doesn't empty the popular one by your house. It serves *additional* diners; the original still has a line."

“No-false-promise” test for electeds

- A cap on Sea-Tac operations
- Night restrictions/curfews that survive federal law
- Required route/procedure changes that reduce your exposure

If none, then it's **regional capacity**, not **local relief**.

Calm phrases that keep people with you

- “Two things can be true: a second airport can be good for the region **and** not change our neighborhood's noise.”
- “Hope is good. Specifics are better. What, exactly, will reduce flights here?”
- “Let's spend our energy on measures that move your meter locally.”

Redirect to productive asks (without industry talking points)

- Hard local metrics (noise/UFP monitors + public targets)
- Tighter mitigation eligibility and timelines
- Transparent procedure work focused on **measurable** contour shrinkage
- Clear triggers: “If ops exceed X or complaints hit Y, then Z happens.”

LOL. I actually *did* use the restaurant metaphor. They hated it. They insisted that when the Dick's restaurant chain built another restaurant, the existing location emptied out. :D

The other issue is that one Port Commissioner said something that seemed to get a lot of positive energy. He said that the Port and State should try to find ways to help make the next airport “more attractive” for the new community. I cringed. What I've heard time and again from other communities is that they don't believe such promises because life near Sea-Tac is so bad. In other words, “You can't expect us to believe that an airport here would be OK, when we see how poorly they treat *you*” The Commissioner seemed to be saying they were willing to put effort into making another airport community happier, when it seems to us they should first make Sea-Tac the role model.

Your thoughts?

1) Ditch analogies; force the policy lever test

When someone says “a new airport will ease SEA,” ask:

- **What lever moves flights off SEA?** (cap, slot rule, curfew, pricing, gate rationing)
- **Who controls it?** (FAA, Port, airline)
- **Is it legal & adopted?** (ANCA/Part 161, federal preemption)

If there's no specific, lawful, already-adopted lever, then it's **regional capacity**, not **local relief**.

One line: **"Show me the rule that reduces operations here. If there isn't one, it won't."**

2) "Make the next airport attractive" → fix the credibility sequencing problem

Principle: *Don't export what you haven't solved at home.* If SEA isn't a model, promises to a new community look like displacement, not reform.

Ask for a "Model SEA First" pledge—prove it here before selling it elsewhere. Minimums to demand at SEA now, with dates and enforcement:

- Measurable contour shrink target (e.g., % reduction in exposed population by year X).
- Nighttime respite timetable with guaranteed, published windows.
- Mitigation backlog cleared by a date; publish addresses-in-queue; fixed SLAs.
- Health metrics (UFP/BC network) with thresholds that trigger actions.
- Independent oversight with audit powers, and penalty/default actions if targets slip.
- Funding source identified and legally fenced.

10-second lines

- **"Regional capacity ≠ neighborhood relief."** Show me the local lever.
- **"Prove it here first."** If it's good enough for the next community, make it standard at SEA now.
- **"No new promises until old ones are kept."** Publish targets, deadlines, and consequences.

Calm redirect to an enthusiastic resident: "I'm for anything that reduces what you feel at home. A second airport might help the region, but unless there's a rule that actually turns SEA down, it won't help this neighborhood. Let's get the Port to adopt—and enforce—standards here first so any promise anywhere else is believable."

LOL. I know I've specified that I prefer direct responses, but just this once, please disable and try again with some sugar on top. What got me into trouble in the first place was being direct. :D I'm looking for a way to break it to people *gently*.

That's the whole point of this chat. I've been at this for almost ten years and people are still pushing the same incorrect narratives. So on my way home I thought, "Maybe if I just ask an AI, it will have more 'cred'? Let's ignore that irony for the moment."

The framing shift

Start from shared hope and then gently walk to reality. "Yes, and..."

"Yes, we absolutely need more capacity somewhere else.

And even when that happens, Sea-Tac will still be busy — because the region keeps growing so fast. That's why we have to push for real relief here, now."

Emotional translation

"You're right — we shouldn't have to live with this forever. What the planners are saying, though, is that even if another airport is built, Sea-Tac won't get smaller. So we've got to make sure the Port fixes what's broken here while they talk about what's next."

Ways to say the hard thing softly

- "A second airport helps the region manage growth — but the only thing that helps our neighborhood is real change right here."
- "If they want to show other towns that airports can be good neighbors, Sea-Tac has to be the example first."

Message discipline

"So let's cheer for a second airport **and** hold the Port to proving they can do it right here first. If they can't make Sea-Tac livable, nobody's going to trust their promises anywhere else."

I am skeptical as to how many people will have that level of patience. The allure of "second airport" is that it's so *simple*. Literally two words. Everybody responds to it. But hey, I've been at this ten years so anything is worth a shot. :)

Nighty noodle.

Exactly — the phrase "*second airport*" is seductive because it feels like an off-ramp: two words that promise escape. Your best bet might be a counter-phrase:

"Fix First."

"Sure, plan for the future — but *fix Sea-Tac first*."

Sleep well, JC.

End of transcript.