

Truth in Aviation



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Progress At Last? Puget Sound Regional Council Pledges Support For State Legislation To Plan for Second Regional Airport

Meeting on Wednesday, December 8, the Executive Board of the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) called on the State government to take the lead role in planning for a second major airport to serve the Central Puget Sound.

The Board pledged its support for new State legislation to produce a State-wide plan for long-term air-transportation capacity. Sen. Karen Keiser (D., 33) introduced such legislation at the 2003 legislative session & intends to introduce similar legislation in the regular session that begins in January.

The Board's resolution recognizes the need to "supplement" Sea-Tac Airport & also recognizes that transportation plans for the next 25 years do not contemplate any additional runway "beyond the third runway".

All of this is a rather bureaucratic way of saying, once again, that a second major airport is needed to serve the needs of the Central Puget Sound, and the State as a whole.

High-Speed Rail Enters the Picture

At the strong urging of Newcastle City Councilmember Sonny Putter (representing smaller cities in King County), the Board added language to the resolution to recognize the need for high-speed inter-regional "ground transportation" (rail). Mr Putter made the point, & Board members agreed, that to be successful a new major airport would need high-speed rail connections to the major population centers.

In the past, the PSRC has given lip service to the idea of a high-speed rail system on the route Eugene, Oregon, to Vancouver, B.C. However, there has been very little thought given to accomplishing such a system. The State Department of Transportation has a program for making incremental changes in existing rail service, which it calls high-speed rail. But the DOT does not contemplate true, European-style high-speed rail (110 m.p.h. and up). A DOT representative at the PSRC meeting said that the aim of the program is to relieve freeway congestion (though this is not the aim as stated in the official plan).

The Regional Commission on Airport Affairs and others have long proposed that the State develop a true high-speed rail system, competitive with air travel in terms of speed & convenience.

It is true that a good, modern rail system would certainly relieve pressure on I-5, as DOT hopes. More importantly switching even a few hundred regional trips per day from air to rail would relieve congestion at Sea-Tac (& at Portland International & the Vancouver airport).

High-speed rail links to one or more new airports should be considered as part of a region-wide system that would connect the major urban centers to one another. For the first time, the PSRC resolution raises this whole discussion to the State and multi-State/Provincial level, no longer treating the air-capacity / regional-travel issue as a local concern of the four counties in the PSRC.

Third-Runway Fill-Haul Trucks Break the Rules – As Expected

The ambitious 2004-2005 schedule for hauling fill to the site of the Sea-Tac Airport third-runway embankment has always been regarded by critics of the runway project as being unrealistic. During the Fall months, the Regional Commission on Airport Affairs and Citizens Against Sea-Tac Expansion received constant complaints from citizens about fill trucks traveling too fast, too close together, & overloaded. Both groups have asked area legislators to help protect the local communities. Sen. Erik Poulsen is reported to be drafting legislation for greater enforcement of weight limits on the trucks. Other legislators have been in touch with the State Patrol (WSP) to encourage more Patrol attention to the trucks. A particular problem is that most of the trucks are running at night, when the Patrol has no-one on duty to check on their actions.

Residents of Maple Valley have complained about a sharp increase in truck traffic through their community from the Kangley gravel pit – greatly exceeding the number of daily trips allowed, & running at times of day when such trips were prohibited. It turns out that the pit operator has now applied to King County's Department of Development & Environmental Services for amendment of its long-standing permit, to allow truck hauling hours to be expanded from the present limits of 6 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, and 7:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. Saturday to all hours except 3:30 to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday (20.5 hours a day!) and from 12 a.m.(midnight) to 9p.m. on Saturdays. The revision also bumps the number of allowable trips up to 400 trips per day, 46 per hour. Public comments on this huge increase were to close on Monday, December 11; however, we now understand that comments will be received through Friday Dec. 17. (Send them to paul.meyer@metrokc.gov)

The Seattle Daily Journal of Commerce reported in its December 10 issue that weight violations by fill haul trucks are endemic, despite a very low number of citations having been issued. A whistleblower from the state patrol says the few trucks actually cited are just the tip of a very heavy iceberg on south King County roadways.

The DJC quotes former WSP commercial vehicle enforcement officer Art Farash as saying, "The Third Runway Project is a big overweight problem". Farash who retired in September after 14 years with the state patrol, is now serving in Iraq. "In the four-month period before I retired, I must have issued well over \$20,000 in overweight

citations to CTI," he said. City Transfer, Inc., of Sumner, is one of five trucking companies hauling fill to the third runway project for prime contractor TTI Constructors.

Those with claims for filing claims for damage associated with the fill material haul for the Sea-Tac Third Runway can go to www.rcaanews.org/latest.htm (at the bottom of the page in the fill haul section) for a list of phone numbers to call and instructions for filing claims.

Efforts To Reduce Jet Engine Air Pollution Take a Set-Back

The Reuters news agency reported on November 23 that State and local air-pollution agencies were pulling out of talks to develop a voluntary program for reducing pollution from aircraft engines, after five years of work that has produced no acceptable results.

Officials with the State and Territorial Air Pollution Program Administrators (STAPPA) and the Association of Local Air Pollution Control Officials (ALAPCO) joined talks in 1999 to reduce pollution from aircraft engines. In a joint letter, the presidents of the two associations told the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Federal Aviation Administration on November 22, "More than five years later, we are extremely disappointed that no progress was made concerning the primary objective of reducing aircraft emissions."

Agreement Unreachable

The two associations reported that they could not reach any agreement with the representatives of the aviation sector. The sole product of this effort was a proposed memorandum of understanding – presented this Summer – focusing only on NOx emissions from airport ground service equipment (GSE). In withdrawing from the stakeholder process, STAPPA and ALAPCO also formally rejected the proposed GSE agreement, which they found was not only "inadequate in scope and stringency," but also "placed unacceptable constraints on State and local air agencies' abilities to protect the public from the adverse health impacts associated with aviation-related pollution."

Primary focus of concern in the talks has been nitrous-oxide emissions (NOx), which are expected to double by the year 2030. NOx is a major factor in smog. Emissions from stationary sources (refineries and power plants) & from automobile & truck engines are stringently regulated, but there are no rules restricting pollution from jet engines. The Reuters report noted that major airports already have NOx emissions that are greater than those from large stationary sources.

Health-Threatening Soot Uncontrolled

The joint letter from the State & local groups said the proposed nitrogen oxide emission standard for aircraft engines was not strong enough, & excluded other pollutants, such as soot (fine airborne particulate matter). The U.S.E.P.A. has been unsuccessful in introducing rules to control the most hazardous soot (at the 2.5 micron level), which is produced by jet engines & which is cause of increasing health concern in airport communities world-wide.

The associations hinted that they and their members might pursue legislative or judicial remedies, writing, "we are committed to identifying and implementing strategies to achieve meaningful reductions in emissions from the aviation sector."

Local readers will recognize the name of ALAPCO's President, Dennis J. McLerran – a former City of Seattle official who is now the Executive Director of the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency.

Runway Gravel Pits Remain Controversial

Controversies still surround potential sites for third-runway fill in King County and In Jefferson County.

Two incumbent County Commissioners who had voted in favor of massive expansion of the "Shine" or "Fred Hill" gravel pit there (with huge pier extending into Hood Canal) were turned out of office at the general election, by candidates opposed to the expansion. David Sullivan defeated incumbent Glen Huntingford by a 55 -45 percentage spread, and Phil Johnson defeated Dan Titterness by a 60-40 spread. Sullivan and Johnson both oppose the pit-to-pier project and have stated that the decision on the 690-acre mining district was flawed.

During massive public hearings attended by hundreds, scores of Jefferson County citizens urged the county commissioners to consider the long range impact of their pending action. Their failure to do so was probably the cause of their defeat at the polls, according to John Fabian, a resident active in the Hood Canal Coalition.

In King County, Maury Island has gained some protection from mining as the result of designation of on-shore areas as an aquatic reserve by Doug Sutherland, Commission of Public Lands. However, the State's Shorelines Hearings Board has reversed King County's earlier denial of a shorelines permit and conditional-use permit for expansion of a gravel mine on Vashon Island. The Board's action has been appealed to Superior Court by Preserve Our Islands, Washington Environmental Council, People for Puget Sound, and King County. The appeal is to be heard in King County Superior Court on July 11, 2005.

PSRC Aviation Workshop Held In Highline Area; Attendees Call For Progress on Second Airport

As the result of requests from RCAA and Citizens Against Sea-Tac Expansion (C.A.S.E.), PSRC agreed to hold its eighth annual aviation workshop in Burien (not in the usual downtown Seattle location), & in the evening (not during the normal work day). The result was that the October 20 PSRC workshop drew the largest attendance ever. Most of those present had long involvement with air-transportation planning issues. Many of the commenters spoke in favor of more action by PSRC on the second airport, & no-one spoke against.

This strong public support for a rather abstract proposition was impressive to officials in attendance, & was later reported by staff to the PSRC Executive Board as a good reason for immediate action. King County Councilmember Julia Patterson gave eloquent support at the workshop (& later at the Executive Board meeting on December 8). Given her rôle

as chair of PSRC's Transportation Policy Board, & former Senator from District 33 (Highline), she spoke with impressive authority.

RCAA has a full videotape of the October 20 workshop available for check-out. Contact librarian@rcaanews.org. Public comments were summarized by PSRC staff, & that summary may be viewed by clicking [here](#) .

Why Is a Second Regional Airport Such a Big Deal?

RCAA's leadership is excited about the action of the Puget Sound Regional Council's Executive Board on December 8, calling for the State to get moving on planning for a new regional airport. Why does RCAA care about a new airport , in view of the fact that RCAA's "primary focus is to STOP THE THIRD RUNWAY AT SEA-TAC AIRPORT"?

RCAA has interests far beyond the third runway. Rational air-transportation planning is central for us. We oppose the runway in part because it is an irrational, ineffective response to the need for better air-travel facilities. Our part of the world needs efficient, reliable air transportation. We will never have that until there are at least two major, international-level airports to serve us. Our comments to the Puget Sound Regional Council in November make the case in detail. It's enough to say, here, the single word "Earthquake!" The next big earthquake will close down Sea-Tac again, will close down Boeing Field again. And the economy of the Central Puget Sound will take a very heavy hit. This planning needs to be done on a state or multi-state level, not confined to four counties in Puget Sound.

Our federally-mandated regional planning body has been on record in favor of a second major airport since 1993. The region should "pursue vigorously" this second airport, PSRC said back in 1993. What has been done in the last 11 years to achieve that goal? Very little. The PSRC's own study of possible sites for such an airport was aborted in mid-career in order to clear the path for Sea-Tac's unneeded third runway. Apparently PSRC has occasionally sent a letter or two down to Olympia, to suggest to State government that something should be done. PSRC itself has done no additional studies, has failed to consult with other agencies that would dearly love to have a major airport in their localities. There has been no follow-up, no action plan. Not till now.

Now, PSRC has heard loud & clear from the interested public that there really IS a need for that new, better airport, and thanks to the leadership of King County Councilmember Julia Patterson, there is now real interest in moving ahead.

For people now hammered by Sea-Tac Airport this is wonderful news. If our State (perhaps in co-operation with Oregon, or British Columbia, or both) can develop a real 21 st century world-class airport, the pressure for further expansion at Sea-Tac will be greatly relieved. A second airport would break Sea-Tac's monopoly (see TIA editorial Sept. 2004), leading to lower costs for air travel & air freight, & a gradual shift of heavy jet traffic to the new airport. And, bottom line, the very real threat of the Sea-Tac FOURTH runway will be dissipated.

Truth to tell, the third runway may not be stopped. Possibly, just possibly, the Port of Seattle may scrape together the \$500 – 700 million needed to finish the project. In that case, RCAA's primary focus would become, "STOP THE FOURTH RUNWAY AT SEA-TAC AIRPORT", for there is no limit to the Airport's ambitions to expand.. The best way to

stop the fourth runway is to provide the future air-transportation capacity, & redundancy, that our region needs, through a modern, state-of-the-art, & not-so-expensive second regional airport.

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