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Citizens Stand Firm Against Third Runway As Lawsuits End

Citizen opposition to the Sea-Tac Airport third runway project remains unchanged, after the withdrawal of the last city-funded legal challenges to environmental aspects of the project on August 17, according to RCAA's President Larry Corvari. "The third runway is still a lousy idea, & the vast majority of people in the Highline communities remain opposed to it. Nothing has changed to make this proposal more acceptable," he said.



Paine Field, Everett

The same message came from Airport neighbors in attendance at the of Citizens Against Sea-Tac Expansion meeting on September 1. "Our members were disappointed that there will be no more City-funded legal challenges," said Brett Fish, C.A.S.E. president, "but they are very aware that the project is still in deep trouble on the financing side, & that the runway's impacts are not being mitigated. "We have no intention of giving up the fight. And we will strongly urge the ACC cities to take an active part in ensuring that the Port strictly follows all the requirements in its environmental permits."

Airport Cities Face Budget Crunch, Withdraw Last-Hope Appeals

Fall-out from the repeal of the motor-vehicle excise tax has resulted in severe budget crises for the cities that have funded the anti-third-runway work to date. Des Moines, for example, expects a \$3 million shortfall in tax revenues in 2005. The last two remaining legal appeals against environmental permits for the runway were deemed to have little chance of success. Thus, the decision to withdraw those appeals & to end the costly courtroom work was almost inevitable, according to observers in the Highline area.

One legal case is still ongoing - the review of the Airport's general water-pollution permit ("NPDES" or "sec. 402" permit) before the Pollution Control Hearings Board. This appeal primarily concerns ongoing second runway pollution and meeting the requirements affirmed by the State Supreme Court in earlier appeals on the third runway. The basic appeal of that permit was filed by the Port. C.A.S.E then filed a cross-appeal, relying on contributions from members of the public. Although the ACC has withdrawn its name from that cross-appeal, ACC contributed no funding to support it. ACC has not announced how it plans to oversee environmental benefits gained through their previous legal actions.

Wasteful Project Lacks Critical Funding

RCAA commented, in a news release, that the proposed runway “is still an incredibly wasteful project that does nothing to meet the future air transportation needs of the Puget Sound. The Port of Seattle still does not have the funding to finish the project – they still are short something like \$700 million. The airlines still do not want to pay their fair share of the project.”

The most recent, best estimate of constructions costs is \$1.3 billion (up from an original estimate of \$229 million). Port financial documents point to a huge shortfall in funding – estimated at \$700 million by RCAA. Tenant airlines at the Airport have been saying loudly that they cannot be expected to meet these costs from their revenues. The Federal Aviation Administration has indicated that in future years it could make an additional grant of \$61.9 million. The only evident source of funding is Port-issued bonds – backed by future increased real-estate taxes throughout King County. Whether the Port has the ability to repay several hundred million dollars in runway bonds is very much in question. For more on runway financing, see companion article.

RCAA, like other airport-concern groups in King County, remains firmly committed to the goal of a new, state-of-the-art regional airport, with adequate buffer areas to protect other folks from airplane noise & air pollution.

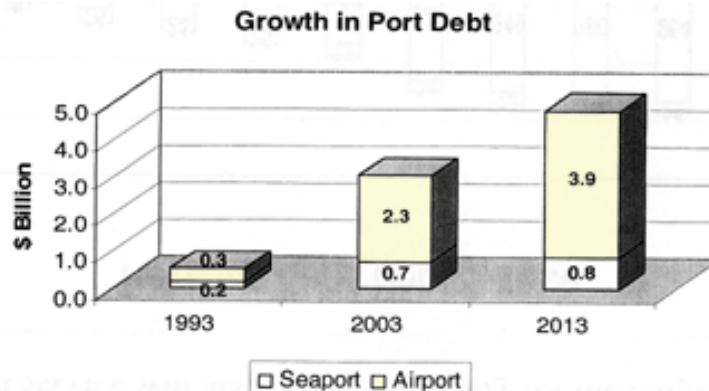
Backgrounder: Why the Runway Project Is a Financial Quagmire

The Sea-Tac third-runway project has been described as a “financial quagmire”. Here's why:

- Official cost estimates have ballooned from an initial \$229 million to the present \$1.3 billion.
- There is no solid funding in place for completion of the work – a shortfall of \$700 million.
- Airport revenues are not adequate for a pay-as-you-go construction program.
- Plans to increase airport revenue by huge increases of fees paid by airlines are encountering stiff resistance from the very airlines that supposedly would benefit from the project.
- The seemingly bottomless pot of Federal money is running dry.

The Port faces a very real risk that construction will come to stop in a year or two for lack of ready cash to pay the firms hauling fill to the site. And the Port is getting extraordinarily deep in debt as the following chart from the Port demonstrates.

Port debt will continue to grow in the foreseeable future
mostly due to the Airport capital plan
and mostly in the form of revenue backed debt



Source: Port of Seattle Budget PowerPoint
Presented to Port Commission June 9, 2004

How did the Port of Seattle get into this mess? The regular method of funding runway construction assumes a sort of partnership of the willing between the airport, the tenant airlines, & the Federal Aviation Administration. All parties assume that the runway's cost will be reasonable. The airlines, in particular, have no wish to accept huge added operating costs as the price for using a runway whose cost is out of sight – especially if there is no particular benefit to them from the project.

But the cost of the third runway is so great that neither the FAA nor the airlines are willing to bear their usual share of the costs, and the Port of Seattle has very little money of its own.

Why the Runway Is So Pricey

Costs are grossly excessive because the runway is being built in the wrong place.

A runway needs a flat, firm space over a mile long. Airport operators normally do not try to build runways in wetlands, in the headwaters of salmon-bearing streams, on the sides of hills. They choose dry land, that is not environmentally sensitive.

Sea-Tac chose to expand *into* wetlands, without considering the costs of mitigating the destruction of wetlands or the massive cost of creating the largest fill-dirt embankment since the Grand Coulee Dam. And because the fill is going into wetlands, it has to be clean, so as not to contaminate local water resources – another additional cost factor, which would not be necessary if the runway were in a suitable place.

Costs are grossly excessive because the Airport has never included required environmental protections in its plans, until forced to by regulatory agencies.

The Airport disregarded legal requirements to protect local streams from drought & flooding, failed to consider the costs of regulating stream flow. This one single omission caused a \$150 million underestimate in project costs. Airport senior staff also chose to disregard expert advice that there might be as much as 100 acres of wetlands in the construction area – they blithely assumed (on no factual basis at all) that only 10 acres would be involved. When outsiders checked, more than 20 acres were implicated, & the cost of wetlands mitigation suddenly doubled.

This cavalier attitude pervaded the Airport's whole approach to environmental requirements. Even after prolonged negotiations with the Department of Ecology as to what was required for a certificate under sec. 401 of the Clean Water Act, the Port's plans provoked comments by Ecology reviewers such as, "didn't do

what we asked”, “incomplete information”, “not good enough”. Translation: Ecology told the Airport & its consultants what to do, but the Airport decided to try to do less than required, time after time. A lot of money was spent in this process, having consultants try again & again to prepare plans that could skate under the legal requirements - & the Airport tacks it all onto the cost of the runway - & expects other people to pick up the tab.

A Workable Financing Plan Requires Confidence Among the Partners

Major runways at civilian airports are built for the benefit of scheduled passenger airlines, & to a lesser degree, for freight carriers. So, it is only right that the airlines make a significant contribution to the costs. They do this through payment of agreed-on landing fees & space rentals to the airport. If an airport attempts to jack up those fees too high, to pay for too-costly projects, the airlines begin to balk. No airline is required to serve any particular airport. If landing fees & rentals are so high that an airline loses money serving an airport, that airline will soon be among the missing. Example: St Louis is waking up even now to the fact that its excessive charges for reckless expansion have helped drive American Airlines away from Lambert Field.

To pay for the runway, the Port of Seattle plans to use its monopoly increase its charges to airlines so that in 2009 the airlines will be paying 250 percent more in fees & rentals than in 2004. The Port proposes to increase its charges to airlines from \$151 million this year to \$378 million in 2009, as the Port's financial forecast below shows.

Airport Financial Forecast

\$ in 000s	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Airline revenues	\$151,354	\$195,549	\$233,662	\$264,689	\$296,727	\$378,072
Non-airline revenues	107,484	116,408	118,214	123,584	123,584	126,567
Other revenues	1,123	1,123	1,123	1,123		
Total revenues	259,961	313,080	352,999	389,396	420,311	504,639
Operating costs	138,323	153,605	167,989	175,773	182,360	193,171
Net operating income	121,638	159,475	185,010	213,623	237,951	311,468
Non-operating income	1,217	995	1,181	1,357	1,512	1,652
Available for debt service	122,855	160,470	186,191	214,980	239,463	313,120
Debt Service	81,932	103,826	123,221	144,486	165,041	222,166
Net cash flow	40,923	56,644	62,970	70,494	74,422	90,954
Key Measures						
Landing fee rate	2.25	2.53	2.91	3.45	3.97	6.90
Airline CPE	10.80	13.59	15.77	17.31	18.82	23.04
Debt service coverage	1.50	1.55	1.51	1.49	1.45	1.41

Source: Port of Seattle Budget PowerPoint
Presented to Port Commission June 9, 2004

Not one airline serving Sea-Tac can make a profit when faced with such rates – unless passenger fares are greatly increased. If fares get much higher than at present, it becomes attractive to drive down to Portland, or to take QuickShuttle up to Vancouver, to catch a cheaper flight. And it becomes attractive for airlines to shift to those other cities. Regional service might shift even closer--to Boeing and Paine Fields.

The Borrowed-Money Trap

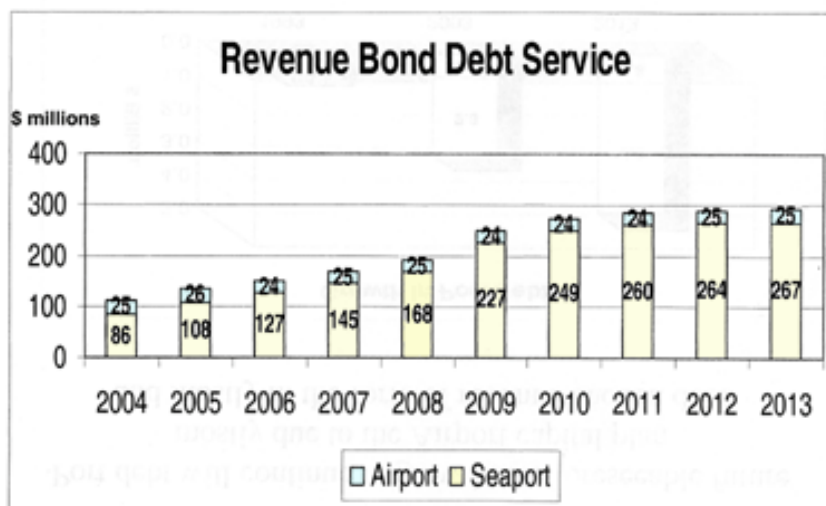
In all discussions of third-runway financing, the Port of Seattle has been very careful not to mention the cost of borrowing money for construction. Most runways can be built on something very close to a pay-as-you-go

basis. Most runways the length of “our” third runway would cost between \$80 million and \$215 million. No long-term borrowing is needed to cover amounts in that range. But a “sticker price” of \$1.3 billion cannot be handled on a pay-as-you-go basis, even at the slow pace of the Port's work on this project.

And so we have to consider borrowing money, & the cost of borrowing. As any homeowner knows, paying off a 20-year mortgage will cost well over twice the face amount of the borrowing. Maybe three times or more, depending on the interest rate. The magic of compound interest makes the cost of borrowing jump up dramatically as the term of the borrowing lengthens, from 20 to 25 to 30 years.

The Port of Seattle plans to increase its bonded indebtedness to \$4.7 billion by the year 2013, mostly for the Airport (\$3.9 billion).

Debt service will also grow, especially for the Airport



Source: Port of Seattle Budget PowerPoint
Presented to Port Commission June 9, 2004

The amount of indebtedness for the Airport in 1993 was only \$300 million. In other words, the Airport's debt will increase by 1300 percent. At that point, the Airport plans to be paying out \$267 million a year just in interest on its debt! Just to avoid default, bankruptcy. Nothing is allocated for *retiring* the debt.

The Interest Rate Trap

But sooner or later, borrowed money must be repaid – or one must default (& for public agencies like the Port, that means bankruptcy). The Port's financial staff is very adept at shuffling debt. In the last three years of non-inflation and very low interest rates, they have masterfully replaced high-interest loans with lower-interest short-term debt. This debt will come due over the next few years (the exact details have not been released). But does any reasonable person believe that interest rates will always been down at the present very-low levels? When present debt must be rolled over in coming years, almost certainly the interest rates will be much higher. Even a modest increase in ordinary interest rates will drive that \$267 million debt-service figure up by a factor of two or three. Where will the Port find the money to pay increased interest in 2010, 2013, 2015?

The Quagmire

The prospect is this: the FAA will not provide any significant new money; the airlines serving Sea-Tac will

refuse to pay the huge increases in fees & rents demanded by the Port; debt will increase, at higher & higher interest rates. Other airports – Paine Field, for example – will see a glorious market opportunity, & will open up to commuter & regional traffic, at rates far, far below what Sea-Tac charges – some airlines will migrate to Paine, or perhaps Boeing Field. Others will simply abandon the Central Puget Sound market. The worst-case scenario is that the major tenant airlines will go broke and simply disappear. The Port of Seattle will be stuck with a shiny almost-new terminal, mostly empty, & a new runway, hardly ever used, & a mountain of debt that it cannot pay.

Neighbors Say: “Runway Is Not Needed”

"Although the legal focus has mostly been on wetlands and water quality, our main objection to the runway is that it is an utter waste of money. It's a really DUMB project," said Larry Corvari, President of RCAA, commenting on what will happen next in the third-runway battle.

According to Corvari and to experts on delay and capacity planning, the most important reason to oppose the runway is that it is simply not needed.

According to the Port of Seattle & its buddies in the local FAA office, the stated purpose of the third-runway project is to allow arriving airplanes to fly closer together upon arrival during peak travel times in bad weather, thus reducing arrival delays. What arrival delays? Not arrival delays that have been experienced in the past – rather, arrival delays that might be expected IF there were to be a huge increase some time in the future in the number of flights into Sea-Tac during bad weather when aircraft must fly by instruments ("IFR")

In fact, most outside experts — including the analysts at FAA national headquarters – believe that for the foreseeable future, the existing airport can handle the traffic without undue delays. Sea-Tac is NOT recognized as an airport with significant delay problems. There are many causes of delay, most of which will not be affected by more runways at Sea-Tac. [See [FAA Benchmark Study](#)]

Are There Delays? Are They Weather-Related?

Any experienced traveller expects delays, whether travelling by air, private auto, train, bus, or camel caravan. Most travellers flying into Sea-Tac have experienced delays. Most of those delays can be traced to congestion at the eight very crowded airports in other parts of the U.S.

O'Hare (Chicago) is most notorious. Far too many flights touch down there. All too often, passengers coming into O'Hare are required to transfer to other flights. All too often, a flight bound to Seattle lands at O'Hare, & then languishes on the ground till other flights have cleared the area. The result? Delay, delay that cannot be made up on the way here. But such delays – as frequent as they are – have nothing to do with conditions here, and a new runway at Sea-Tac won't cure problems at O'Hare. Other overcrowded airports include Atlanta, Logan, Kennedy, and LaGuardia.

What About Other Causes of Delay at Sea-Tac?

Citizen critics of the runway project do not say that *all* the arrival delay at Sea-Tac is the result of delay at other airports. Clearly, plenty of scheduled flights do in fact leave for Sea-Tac on time, but arrive on the ground, at the gates, not on time.

Despite claims of the Port, the fact is that most arrival delays at Sea-Tac are in no way related to our local weather. Dr Stephen Hockaday, an authority on these problems points out that the Port's figure of 44% poor weather does not match the FAA definition of poor weather and is incorrectly calculated. According to Dr Hockaday, IFR conditions only occur 7.9% of the year, and as little as 3% percent of the time during peak demand when the third runway would be used.

Many delays happen in poor weather, lousy weather, & very good weather. Why? Because of over-scheduling.

In the United States, we have a really weird system for running airports. No-one is in charge. Airport “operators”, like the Port of Seattle, build airports. But legally the airport operator has NO control over the actual use of its runways. It is air-traffic controllers working for the Federal Aviation Administration who decide which runways shall be used by which departing or arriving aircraft. Those disembodied voices that say things like, “Delta Flight 603, you are cleared for arrival on Runway 16-L” are NOT the voices of Sea-Tac Airport: they are the voices of FAA staff.

Oh! FAA runs things, then!

No, not quite. The FAA does not tell the airlines when to arrive or when to depart Sea-Tac. Legally, there is nothing to prevent an airline that uses Sea-Tac from trying to land 30 flights at the same time. If something like that happens, the system inevitably breaks down, & there are significant delays. Think of I-405 at rush hour – with no metered on-ramps. There are NO equivalents of metered on-ramps or off-ramps at Sea-Tac. At peak periods, too many aircraft are trying to land. And no-one can say “Stop! Re-schedule for 20 minutes later!” Yet, it's clear that modest adjustment of schedules would cure most Sea-Tac arrival delays. This is called demand management. Demand management is illegal – unconstitutional, in fact – in this FAA region. It is mandatory at O'Hare. Is Sea-Tac in a different country than Chicago, with different aviation laws? Apparently.

Can We Fix the Problem Without Spending \$1.3 Billion?

Even without changing schedules, there are several good, & much cheaper, alternatives for relieving arrival delay at Sea-Tac than another part-time runway. It would be more sensible to implement these alternatives now, even though arrival delay is only a trivial problem at present. Using better aviation systems would be good: GPS (Global Positioning Satellite) systems & other proven technologies would allow aircraft to arrive much more frequently during poor weather than at present.

The Port has chosen the most expensive approach to addressing a problem that is almost non-existent.

Backgrounder:

Environmental Reasons Why This Is a Bad Project

Sea-Tac Airport isn't just a government-funded business that most of us use. It's also the single biggest polluter in Washington State. Large jet airports, like Sea-Tac, generate massive amounts of air pollution, water pollution, storm water runoff, and noise pollution - pollution unmatched by any other single source.

Historically, the Airport has done very little to control its pollution or to ameliorate its effects. It spends none of its profits on pollution control or cleanup. Profits are reserved to pay for expansion. If the Airport does any environmental work at all, it is work funded by the FAA, the State, King County taxpayers, or neighboring cities and school districts.

In its environmental impact statement for the third runway project, the Port made it very plain that it planned to do nothing to mitigate the additional environmental effects from the third runway. The only "mitigation" in the budget was money to buy out properties needed for the runway. That is not so much mitigation as it is expansion.

This touched off an impact-by-impact battle to get the Port either to halt the project or to deal fully with the impacts. The Port has vigorously avoided admitting that there are any impacts and has only been willing to mitigate them if forced to.

\$6 Million Dollars for an EIS That Tells Two Conflicting Stories

The Port spent six million dollars writing an environmental impact statement that ran several thousand pages -

assuring that few people actually would read it. But those who did noticed a large, very obvious problem. In the "benefits" section, the EIS claimed that the runway would double Sea-Tac capacity but in the "impacts" section, the EIS claimed that the runway would produce no increase in arriving air traffic (and thus, no impacts).

When the Highline cities, through their Airport Communities Coalition, took the Port to court, pointing out that the runway could not both double the operations and not increase them at all, the Port simply argued that the law did not require them to tell the truth in an impact statement, just write an impact statement. In one of the worst decisions it ever made, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit agreed with the Port.

To this day, the Port maintains that the third runway will create no new significant pollution. It has never revised the EIS.

Jets Don't Create Air Pollution

The brown bubble you can see sitting over the Highline area from Seattle is jet plane pollution from Sea-Tac. Jets give off great amounts of pollution, including very fine particulates. Recent studies show that such particulates are more likely to penetrate deep into the lungs and are implicated in higher rates of asthma & lung cancers, so frequently observed in airport communities. Jet fuels also contain a known carcinogen (benzene), thought to be a source of unusual hot spots of brain cancers near airports.

But no federal agency monitors or measure jet particulate pollution. The Federal Clean Air Act only covers large particle particulate pollution of 10 microns or greater, much larger than the fine particles of jet pollution. It also doesn't cover toxic substances like benzene.

In the 1990s the U.S. EPA attempted to issue a new rule requiring monitoring of particles down to 2.5 microns in diameter, but the EPA was unable to overcome the pressure from special interests opposing the rule. So, the primary pollution from jet engines around airports is not measured, is not known. Sea-Tac Airport has vigorously resisted monitoring jet-plane air pollution. Neither the Airport, the EPA, or the State's Puget Sound Air Pollution Control Agency is interested in the highly volatile benzenes that fall on our neighborhoods when fuel is dumped over urban areas. Because it is not measured, it doesn't exist!

Well, serious air pollution from jet planes does exist. It is a health issue, and some day our society will have to deal with it. In the mean time, people fall ill, children develop asthma, and older folks die too soon – off the official radar screen.

Jets Are Silent

Jet-plane noise is a particularly intrusive, annoying type of noise. It causes health problems, has a severe effect on classroom learning, and results in serious depression of property values – which in turn harms individual residents, the social fabric of communities, & the viability of local governments. One [study](#) shows that residents within one quarter mile of the flightlines lose 20% of the value of their homes to airport noise.

The Port provides little mitigation for noise impacts – most of it too little & too late. The basic two programs are home insulation & buy-outs. The buy-outs do not lessen noise – they simply displace the neighbors. Each round of buy-outs has been followed by expansion of activities or of the campus, or both – leading to a new round of buy-outs. The Port demands that homeowners receiving insulation for second-runway noise agree not to sue over third-runway noise.

The Port uses noise-measurement & reporting methods that seriously *underestimate* the true noise impacts, & that rely on inaccurate computer modelling. Real-world monitoring is carefully avoided. Listening to the complaints from the public is not a serious concern. Port noise maps are based on annual averages of noise, rather than on individual events, & such maps do not report the full impact of past, present, or future Sea-Tac noise. According to its website, the Port continues to rely on its 1990 Noise Program which was found to be wholly inadequate by an independent panel of experts in 1993.

Although noise-reduction studies are supposed to be done fairly frequently, the Port vetoes most of the

effective recommendations such studies produce.

Weirdly, the EIS for the third runway shows noise only for the highest impact area of 65DNL. ("65DNL") is a average noise level for twenty four hours: 200 jets an hour at an earsplitting 80 decibels creates approximately 65 DNL average.) According to the Port's EIS, jets are silent the instant they pass 65DNL line. In the fairyland of the third runway EIS, jets that make enough noise on one side of the street to increase the rates of miscarriage, deafness in children, high blood pressure and a host of other illness, make *no* noise across the street. And no noise in Seattle, Federal Way, Mercer Island, or Bellevue.

What Water Pollution?

Construction of the runway embankment requires filling in or otherwise damaging more than 20 acres of wetlands, a stream relocation, & creation of a great amount of new impermeable surfaces. All of this does harm to local streams, ponds, & the wetlands that clean & nourish the streams. A new runway would be a new source of pollutants, which need to be diverted or removed from Airport run-off. At present, the Port's run-off all finds its way, mostly untreated, into Puget Sound.

The Port has consistently understated the scope of these problems, starting with its runway EIS, & carrying through in its three different applications to the Department of Ecology for construction approval, & in its pending general water-pollution permit. The neighbors are not fooled. They know that Miller, Walker, & Des Moines Creeks are sometimes toxic to the fish that use them. They see local ponds turn vile green with scum. They see mounds of foam in local creeks. They see the creeks running opaque with silt from construction work. These problems – minimized, unaddressed by the Port – will continue to drive local opposition to the runway & other Airport expansion projects. The true costs of curing these problems have yet to be disclosed

Backgrounder:

Why Third Runway Is So Unfair

Location, location, location

Opposition to the Sea-Tac third runway project remains very strong in the Highline area because of the heavy burdens that the runway would thrust on the citizens & cities in Highline (South-West King County).

Sea-Tac has a tiny airport campus in the middle of long-established, almost totally residential neighborhoods. These neighborhoods are concentrated on the south and west side of the Airport, where they will suffer the most impact from addition of a third runway. Because of the tiny campus, most of the pollution impacts fall on properties not belonging to the Airport.

The west side of Airport is particularly sensitive because, for a decade, from 1977 through 1987, the Sea-Tac Communities Plan (in which the Port participated) encouraged local cities to locate housing, businesses, and on the west side near the existing airport. Unfortunately, this development is under what has become the flight path of the proposed third runway.

At the time, the Port said that the west side was such a problematic site that it would never build a third runway there. As late as 1992, Port Commissioner Pat Davis told the *Highline Times* that Port had no desire to build a third runway. So, many in the community were caught off-guard by the sudden appearance of the third-runway plan. Property values in the area took an instant nosedive, leaving many homeowners pinned in place.

Neighbors Pay Airport Costs

Although the State treats Sea-Tac as a facility of state-wide importance, it is run by one small county-wide agency - the Port of Seattle. The State does not control the expansion programs of local airports. The State provides no mechanism for distributing the costs of the impacts of airports to all those who benefit from them. In practice, impacts not paid for by an airport are subsidized by the next-door neighbors.

The costs associated with the third runway project are disproportionately borne by communities immediately

surrounding the Airport. Communities such as Burien and Des Moines will be impacted by noise, traffic congestion, and socioeconomic hardship merely because of their location near the Airport. Of the estimated \$2.95 billion in potential mitigation costs in the area south of the Seattle city limits, \$2.3 billion (almost 80%) is projected to be required for Burien and Des Moines alone. Other environmental, transportation, and socio-economic costs have not yet been calculated.

Airport Income Pays No Environmental Costs

A basic strategy of the Port of Seattle is to shift its costs for the Airport on to others. (These 'others' have less ability to pay, & little ability to protest.) The Port does nothing about the health problems arising from air pollution or noise. The Port provides no relief to homeowners or businesses whose property values are hammered by noise. The Port does not make compensating payments to local governments for lost revenues. The Port is dilatory in following sound environmental practices in dealing with water pollution, leaving the people and cities downstream to feel the impacts & to try to undo the harm at their own expense.

The Port's plan for financing runway construction & other expansion projects appears to be to continue selling bonds backed by future real-estate taxes to be collected by the Port. The Port's share of the cost of the noise-mitigation program in local schools is being paid out of real estate taxes levied county-wide (including residents in the school district most heavily impacted by noise – who are also paying equal amounts into the program through a local bond issue!).

All of these costs, & others, should be part of the cost of doing business at an airport, & they should be met entirely from the operating revenues of the Airport.

Editorial:

Breaking Sea-Tac's Monopoly

With the legal cases between the Port of Seattle and the Airport Communities Coalition at an end, it's time to take a fresh look at aviation planning in the Central Puget Sound. Why is it that we have only one airport serving most of our needs for scheduled passenger service? Most large urban areas in the U.S. have at least two airports, & usually those airports are competing with one another. Competition is a good thing – it results in better service, lower costs, & increased flexibility. Sea-Tac's efforts to jack up its charges to airlines by 250% demonstrate how monopoly power harms the public interest. Multiple airports also provide some assurance of continued air travel in case of natural disaster (earthquakes are our local specialty), fire, flood, plane crash, labor strife, terrorist attacks We need to get serious about this problem.

Everyone gives lip service to the idea of having more than one airport to meet our local air-travel demands, even the Port of Seattle. But since this became official policy of the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) eight years ago, no public agency has done much to push the idea towards reality. It has fallen to citizen airport-concern groups to keep the flame alive. Seattle Council on Airport Affairs has made a second regional airport one of its three top priorities, & in the months ahead, the Regional Commission on Airport Affairs will be putting renewed emphasis on this issue.

PSRC Wants To Hear from Us

The time is right for citizens & public officials to pay more attention to the single-airport problem. For the first time ever, PSRC will hold its annual aviation workshop out in the community. Here is a grand opportunity to speak out for a better airport system that does not reinforce Sea-Tac's present monopoly. The workshop is scheduled for 7 p.m., Wednesday, October 20, at the Highline School District's board room, 15675 Ambaum Boulevard SW, Burien. PSRC is well aware that it needs to find a way to realize its own goal of a multiple airport system. Interested citizens can make a real difference by adding their support.

Passengers Planes for Paine Field

This issue is more than an exercise in planning. While Sea-Tac Airport likes to pretend that it is the only possible place for scheduled airline services, Paine Field (Snohomish County) and Boeing Field (King County)

are available & suitable for regional passenger service. In August, Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon approved a study group's recommendation that the County should pursue scheduled passenger service for Paine Field.

The County's Citizens Cabinet on Economic Development, in its final report issued last month recommended "Seek a way to start air service from Paine Field". The report commented, "The infrastructure assets that comprise the airport itself, as well as the associated roads serving it, are not being used to their fullest extent. Paine Field could provide substantially more convenient air travel alternatives for Snohomish County businesses and citizens. The addition of passenger air service at Paine Field would add significant benefits to efforts to attract and retain hi-tech businesses."

Historically, Paine Field has not been a passenger airport. According to Seattle Council on Airport Affairs Board members who have toured the facility & discussed its future with the Airport's director & deputy director, Paine Field would need a much-improved passenger terminal, as well as additional ground support facilities (like car rental agencies). No detailed cost estimates for these improvements have been released, but RCAA estimates the cost for an appropriate terminal at between \$20 and \$50 million.

... and Over at Boeing Field

Boeing Field (King County International Airport) has served as a passenger airport for decades. Its existing terminal is newly refurbished. There is sufficient parking for air travellers adjacent to the terminal. The main runway, at 10,000 feet, is quite long enough for regional jets. Two small airlines (HeliJet and San Juan) currently operate out of the facility. Helijet serves various British Columbia locations. San Juan serves the Olympic Peninsula, the San Juans, & Sidney, B.C. The facilities for passenger service are in place, in use, & adequate for much greater use.

How About a New, Major Airport?

Paine Field and Boeing Field can, and likely will, pick up an increasing share of the regional passenger traffic, as Sea-Tac's charges become increasingly burdensome. But in the long run, the region needs a second major airport, one that can handle the big four-engine transcontinental aircraft that carry passengers by the hundreds. Lankbanking the site now is the best strategy for the long-term. Locating suitable sites for such an airport (or perhaps two) will require a serious commitment from the State Legislature.

That search will require adequate funding. Once suitable sites have been identified, the experts will need to evaluate them in depth. And once the studies are complete, there must be serious funding for land purchases, highway & rail access (FAA will not pay for those items), airport engineering, construction, terminals. PSRC started this work a decade ago but abandoned it in order to focus on the third runway. In our view, PSRC should re-start the work, perhaps under a contract with the State, and in co-operation with the State of Oregon and the Western Washington counties that are not part of PSRC. Eventually – why not now?

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