

**Groton-New London Airport Master Plan  
Public Meeting  
June 9, 2011, 7-8:30 pm  
Groton City Hall  
Meeting Report**

*The meeting opened at 6:30 pm with a presentation at 7 pm.*

**Introduction:**

David Head, Transportation Supervising Planner and Study Manager, Connecticut Department of Transportation (Department), thanked folks for attending the public meeting and introduced the consultant team. He noted that the Master Plan Update process was first started in 2006-2007, but due to Department of Transportation staffing issues, the process had undergone a hiatus. He noted that much has changed since 2006-2007, not just the economy but also the aviation industry itself. As a result, he said that the first Working Papers, including projections, would be reviewed and revised. He then introduced Ervin Deck, study manager, Stantec.

Ervin Deck, Stantec Study Manager, introduced key attending individuals: Catherine Young, Airport manager; Gail Lattrell, Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), and members of the Public Advisory Committee. Erv explained that a Master Plan defines where an airport is today and where it might be in 20 years. It provides an inventory of the airport and assesses the function of the airport. The Master Plan forecasts what the economy and community needs will be, and evaluates the capacity to meet demand shown in the forecast. It evaluates what can be done to change the capacity, and these alternatives will be presented tonight. Then, the environmental issues are evaluated and an Airport Layout Plan (ALP) is developed. Finally, a financial plan will look at how any changes might be funded.

Erv detailed the Plan Update schedule, explaining that one additional Working Paper would be created, after which there would be another Public Advisory Committee meeting, and another Public Meeting to review the final update.

Erv noted that the ALP is the key technical document, a legal document that is signed off on by the FAA and Department, which allows for federal funding. The ALP it is the blueprint for the Airport's

future. If an improvement is not included in the plan, it cannot be made a reality until the ALP is updated.

Gail Lattrell, Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), pointed out that one of the purposes for the ALP is that it protects the Airport and FAA from development plans that could threaten the Airport's functionality. For example, if someone wanted to construct a cell tower near the Airport, they need FAA approval. The Plan allows FAA to determine where the best place for such a tower might be. It gives the FAA the power to protect the Airport from incompatible development.

Ervin clarified that the State is the sponsor of the airport, and determines its ultimate direction and focus. The FAA establishes guidelines so all master plans look the same, approves the forecasts and approves the ALP.

### **Groton-New London Airport (GON)**

Ervin explained that GON is a designated General Aviation (GA) airport, a public use airport that anyone can use. It serves the Groton-New London area, handles a wide range of aircraft, mostly serving businesses, plus the Theater Aviation Sustainment Maintenance Group (TASMG), which repairs military helicopters and related aviation equipment.

Ervin then showed an aerial of the Airport and described the locations and uses of buildings and activities.

### **Aviation Activity**

Erv noted there are 40-45 aircraft based at GON, with currently 42,000 operations year, which is down by about 10,000 in the last few years due to the loss of Pfizer and the economic downturn.

The design aircraft picked for GON is the ERJ-135, a twin-engine corporate turbojet aircraft. Since Pfizer has left, this may need to be reassessed. The design aircraft is defined as the fastest aircraft using the Airport at least 500 times a year. The design aircraft defines length of runways and dictates the Airport Reference Code, which for GON is C-II for the main runway. Erv said that the airport is well designed for its use.

### **Forecasts**

Erv said that developing forecasts is an art as opposed to a science. There is always lots of uncertainty and most are 40% off in a 5-6 year period. He looks at multiple scenarios to estimate a range of demand. He noted that the state would want to be prepared if and when the economy comes back, that we want the airport to be in a position to respond to the market. He noted that we want to include alternatives that will minimize risk for the state.

Erv said that they would take another hard look at the forecast, that in 2008 there were 10,000 more operations, and he believes that for the next five years, operations may stay flat.

Question: How off were the original Master Plan forecasts?

Erv: They were off. I will look in my files in a few minutes and check by how much. *(Later in the meeting, Erv confirmed that in 1999, operations forecasts for 2010 were projected at 116,000, much higher than the actual number.)*

### **Demand capacity and facility requirements**

Erv explained that they are recommending maintaining Part 139 Certification, (this refers to FAA certification of commercial service airports), as it will not cost much more to do so, and positions the airport well for unexpected opportunities. He noted that the Airport Manager has done an excellent job and the Airport is in excellent shape.

*Airside:* Erv said that the airside, which is the runways and operating side of an airport, does not need additional infrastructure; possibly the runway width could be reduced when the asphalt begins to break up. Essentially, the State should continue to preserve and protect the infrastructure. When certain items need to be replaced, for example, the runway lights, that would be the time to upgrade to LED lights.

*Landside:* Erv pointed out that the focus of future development should be the landside (the part of the airport that includes access roads, the terminal and other related buildings such as hangars) and potential revenue production. While aircraft parking apron areas are in surplus, he noted that additional hangar space would be required in the next few years. He explained that as planes are becoming more expensive, people want hangar space versus apron space, so this may be a good opportunity for expansion. Erv noted that there is too much

automobile parking currently available compared to need, and some of that space could be used for something more productive.

Erv explained that TASMG is preparing its own separate Master Plan and looking at doubling their total capacity from 200,000 to 400,000 square feet.

### **Airport Alternatives**

Erv explained that there are three alternatives being evaluated, however further development of the airside will be minimal in all three alternatives examined:

1. Do nothing/No build. We do not need hangars today, but if Fixed Base Operators (FBOs) find they need it in the future, they can negotiate with the Airport sponsor in terms of building additional hangar space.
2. Plan for minimal change in capacity. This would involve looking at a plan for minimal change and reconfiguring some buildings
3. Plan for maximum change in capacity. This would include more changes and some new buildings.

Erv explained that the State will make this decision, and he recommends maximizing the Airport's potential in a way that will not place a burden on taxpayers. He noted that Catherine has done an excellent job balancing these two needs.

### **Minimum Build**

Erv showed a map of the areas that would be changed based on the minimum build concept. There would be one parking area, plus employee parking, with a single road in and out, opening up more space for hangars. The space across the road is reserved for compatible aviation activity, that is, something that would not cause problems for aircraft-related activities. Hangar development in the form of conventional hangars (versus T-hangars) could be confined to an area adjacent to the existing terminal building by using the current surplus automobile parking space.

### **Full Build**

Erv showed a map of the potential Full Build Concept. He explained that the control tower could be moved along with the terminal building, opening up much more area for hangar development. The

reason for this potential change relates back to the airport reference code, or ARC, discussed earlier. Under the existing and forecasted ARC, buildings and other infrastructure can be located closer to the runway environment, opening up a large area currently excluded from development. Erv stressed that this is using his experiences to evaluate what might work, but that the Airport growth, if it occurs, could be different. He showed the location of a new terminal building with passenger waiting area. He emphasized that all this change could take place on an as-needed basis, and the decision is up to the state and private development pressure. In any scenario, development would be piecemeal, taking place as private developers and investors see the need and are willing to accept the financial risk.

### **Environmental Overview**

Erv introduced Paul Stanton of Fitzgerald Halliday, the firm that is handling the environmental overview for the Plan update.

Paul explained that this is a high-level look at what environmental factors could be impacted by the different alternatives. In a federal project, on the coast, these factors are very carefully monitored. He explained that this is not a full-blown Environmental Impact Statement, but just an overview to provide planners with a sense of what they might face for the different alternatives.

Paul noted that they would examine the level of threatened and endangered species, coastal resources, wetlands, land use and community facilities and other natural resources. He said that there are endangered species and Connecticut state-listed birds in evidence.

Paul said that when looking at alternatives, the environmental factors will play a part, and each will be rated based on their environmental effect. He pointed out that some would have none, some will have negative effects that can be mitigated, but some could have larger negative effects that would delay or compromise a project. Paul explained that these are the basic issues that will affect the decision of selecting the preferred alternative.

### **Evaluation of Alternatives**

Erv explained that there are four major categories in evaluating alternatives:

- Operational performance

- Best planning tenets
- Environmental factors
- Fiscal factors

Erv explained that in operational performance, the Airport's polices and practices and compliance with standards is assessed.

Finally, Erv went over the planning level costs for each alternative, showing what the estimated cost would for any potential new elements. The costs ranged from \$750,000 for updated runway lighting in the No Build alternative, to \$6.75 million for the Minimum Build to \$18 million for the Full Build alternative. He noted that almost all of the cost for the minimum and full build alternatives would be privately funded.

### **Next Steps**

Erv detailed the next steps. Working together and based on the plan data, the State and FAA will pick a preferred alternative, likely a combination of Minimum and Full Build. This would take place in a phased approach. By early August, Working Paper #4, which is on the environmental effects and includes a noise model, will be available to the State and FAA, then to the Public Advisory Committee (PAC). In October, a PAC Meeting will take place, after which they will hold another Public Meeting to review the preferred alternative.

Erv asked everyone who wanted to track the progress of the Plan Update to make sure their name is on the sign-in sheet

### **Questions**

Question: I have concerns regarding soot from jet aircraft on the main runway. It goes on my boat and I have to paint my house yearly. Can you do anything to help the neighborhood?

Comment: This is something that needs to be addressed. In Boston they put in new windows, doors, and provide air-conditioning. There are ways of looking into this and taking care of things.

Gail Lattrell: Massport and Massachusetts Public Health did an air quality study and showed there were films on decks and cars. It was not just about soot but was about health and air quality. We will find this study and provide you with a copy

Comment: Thank you and can you get the study to the consultants and on the website as well?

David Head: Yes, we will do some research.

Question: The Department of Environmental Protection had developed what GON would look like under sea level rise and those images got a lot of play. You did not mention this in your report. The airport is at sea level. The plan goes out 20 years in the future and there will be a substantial sea level rise. What are the plans for this, as it is cheaper to plan ahead versus reacting. Also, more storms should be factored into repair costs.

David: This is a good comment. Sea level rise is being looked at from a statewide level for all infrastructure and we will be using that data for GON.

Paul Stanton: We went to Transportation Review Board conference. They are projecting that at 80 years out we will see significant rise. That is beyond the study period but we should have a note to that effect.

David: Yes, we will put a note in the plan now, even if a rise is not projected within the 20 years.

Question: Did you do a cost analysis of reducing runway width versus keeping it the same?

Erv: No, we did not. But maintaining versus reducing the width would be a significant amount of money.

David: When it comes time to rehabilitate the runway, we will be looking at it in detail. Reducing the width means less runoff, but a lot of things will go into the decision.

Comment: Usage has dropped so much over last 30 years – GON will never be what it was. I don't see a rise in sea level, I see a decrease in the water levels. Are there studies that actively pursue getting short-term passenger service?

Catherine Young: DOT is doing a business plan for the Airport. They want to be aggressive in looking for additional business. It is difficult to forecast at this moment.

Comment: I do not see any growth taking place here.

Gail: Most of the expense in an airport is in the safety requirements and the taxiway. Most investment here is already made. Most of what Erv has been talking about is private investment, not public dollars. It will only happen if it is needed.

Comment: Groton got very aggressive with tax incentives, and I doubt anything will be needed. Connecticut doesn't think that way – I see nothing aggressive.

Comment: We (Lanmar Aviation) are attending a lot of events for the purpose of increasing the visibility of Groton. Most people don't know what GON has or where we are located. We need to work on being a destination airport. Lanmar and Columbia are taking on the burden of getting those aircraft here, which will generate revenue for the State of Connecticut.

Comment: You are speaking about private aircraft.

Lanmar: We would love to see other carriers coming in, as it would be better for fuel and income. But that takes a lot of personal effort.

Question: Are all the hangars rented?

Lanmar: We have 36 hangars and all but 5-6 are rented. We have a lot of transients that come in from Long Island, Rhode Island and Massachusetts. We won't have the same type of airport but there is lots of business to be gained. We could increase hangar capacity, bring in additional aircraft, there would be growth and more business. This plan is good for us to help make the Airport grow.

Comment: When I read Working Paper #3, I see you say that No Build will not cost anything or increase revenues. You don't need to build anything, just get tenants into existing space. When I see empty space and parking lots with weeds, I cannot see alternatives #2 or #3. This report is biased. With alternative #1, you can add revenue without spending money. You need to spend money on marketing, not building.

David: Yes, that is what we are trying to do. We will use what we have and as it starts to get full, if an economic upturn happens, we will be prepared. Erv has been stressing that we will do this in pieces.

Comment: You already told me that earlier forecasts were off – that is why we should do a cost benefit analysis. I want to see this before anything is done. We are at full buildout now.

Gail: That is true on the airside and we will not grow there. The growth will be on the landside. We will look carefully at the forecasts as well. It is not a build it and they will come scenario.

Question: Why did they build a new runway – why did they pave it that wide?

Gail: When a runway is reconstructed, it has a 20-year life. In this case it was rebuilt because of the age of the pavement, and they looked at length and width in terms of safety 10 years ago. A lot has changed since then, now they look at what do we need for a particular airport and design it for that. We will look at it again and adjust to each airport's needs. We are not building based on the projection numbers, we are building based on what is happening now. We look at the environment, the facility, and the need – and try to have good balance.

Comment: The business plan will answer many of those questions.

Catherine: It will benefit us that the Business Plan and the Master Plan are taking place at the same time. It is hard for people who remember what it used to be like here. Or see it now empty and with weeds and wonder why. It is because business has changed. The first Master Plan showed space to be developed and it has been developed by private industry. Now it is time to review again.

Question: What does the [airport's] profit and loss statement say?

Catherine: Erv referred to it. We now have fewer costs and increased income due to the additional buildings.

Erv: The Airport used to have just under \$277,000 annual revenue; with expenses at just under \$1 million. In 2006-2007, the last full year we have data for, revenue grew to \$668,500 and expenses are down to \$758,800. We are looking to give the State options and help the FBOs to grow their business.

Question: Looking at the optimal use of what we have, the 139 certificate requires a sterile area in front. Could that space be used for an event?

Catherine; Yes, that space is available.

*(A general discussion took place regarding marketing opportunities people had experienced or heard about that involved airports.)*

Comment: My bottom line is money. Pfizer is moving to Boston. It is scary, look at Mohegan Sun, it is just sitting there, not paying off. There is no free lunch. It ends up coming from here.

Question: When I was in business we had a 5-year strategic plan. We also had an operating marketing plan for the year. My question is, would DOT be amenable to that kind of thing?

David: I think the new CAA will be doing marketing for all Connecticut-owned airports.

Question: Are they looking at changing lease prices?

David: I do not know that yet.

Erv: Thank you, everyone, for attending.

*The meeting ended at 8:38 pm.*