Groton-New London Airport Master Plan
Advisory Committee Meeting
April 26, 2011, 1-3 pm
Meeting Report/Working Paper #3

Attending: Marian Galbraith, City of Groton; Denny Hicks, Chamber of Commerce of Eastern Connecticut, City of New London; Robert Taylor, aircraft owner; Gail Lattrell, FAA Regional Planning Office; David Head, CTDOT; Andy Davis, CTDOT; Molly Parsons, CTDOT; Colleen Kissane, CTDOT; Catherine Young, Groton-New London Airport; Karen Buffkin, CT Office of Policy and Management; David Fox, DEP; Eric Thompson, aircraft owner; Tricia Cunningham, Mystic Chamber of Commerce; Denise Rose, City of New London; James Edwards, Lanmar Aviation; Jessica Power; Lanmar Aviation; Krys Kowalski, CTDOT; Josh Theodore, Columbia Air; Major Dawn Works-Dennis, CT ARNG-CFMO; Col. Jerry Lukowski, CT ARNG-CFMO; LTC Scott Panagrosso, 1109th AVCRAD/TASMG CT ARNG; Mark Oefinger, Town of Groton; Tim Seidel, SECT LOG; Carl Strand, Chair, Airport Advisory Committee; Liz Child, Avis Budget Group; Jim Bates, Groton Business Association; Ervin Deck, Stantec; Randy Christensen, Stantec; Carol Morris, Morris Communications.

The meeting began at 1:10 pm

Introduction

David Head, CTDOT Study Manager, welcomed everyone and noted that the Master Plan Update process was first started in 2006, but due to Department of Transportation staffing issues; the process had undergone a hiatus. He noted that much has changed since 2006, not just the economy but also the airline industry itself, including the then-assumption that turbojets would be the aircraft of the future. 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.

Review of Study Findings To-Date

Ervin Deck asked the committee members to introduce themselves, as many were new since the previous meeting in 2009, reminded the committee that everything they would be seeing was still a draft, and said that previous Working Papers were available for those who needed them.

Ervin noted that the Master Plan is a requirement of the Federal Aviation Authority (FAA), that it describes existing conditions and forecasts how an airport could look in 20 years. He said that nationwide, there are big changes due to the recession. Ervin reminded the Committee that the first Working Paper looked at existing conditions and the forecast and the second Working Paper looked at the facility requirements of the Airport, and projected what new facilities could potentially be needed, allowing FAA and the state to project costs.

Working Paper #1

Ervin reviewed Working Paper #1, summarizing the existing conditions at the Airport on both the airside and the landside. He indicated that in the case of Groton-New London, the landside (building, parking areas) was the area of focus because the airside (runways, taxiways) is in excellent condition, with plenty of room for growth. The landside is also in excellent shape but could be reconfigured to allow more economic opportunity. He noted that total operations at the Airport in 2008 were 53,500, and at that time were projected to be 54,800 now, but have actually declined to 41,000.

Ervin reviewed the definition of a Design Aircraft as the largest and fastest aircraft in use at an airport totaling at least 500 operations in a year. This Design Aircraft defines the size of runways, safety areas, etc. For Groton-New London, the ERJ-135 (Regional Jet) is the Design Aircraft, based on Pfizer's utilization of that aircraft. Ervin noted that since Pfizer no longer uses the Airport, he and the study team would evaluate if this aircraft were still the right choice.

Ervin went over the existing Forecast, stating that it will be reviewed and if needed revised:

- 45% increase in based aircraft
- 77% increase in turbojets
- 18% increase in operations
- 46% in passenger emplanements
- No change in design aircraft
- No change in Airport Reference Code (C-II).

Working Paper #2

Ervin reviewed the Airport Facility Requirements:

Airside

- No need for additional runway or taxiway capacity
- Correct safety area deficiencies (being done with current project)
- Reduce runway width (but will reassess when runway needs to be reconstructed)
- Upgrade airfield lighting (again, when lighting needs replacement)
- Upgrade instrument approach capability – new technology uses GPS, not land-based equipment

Landside

- Upgrade General Aviation facilities
- Replace ARFF equipment
- Increase SRE capacity
- Expand SRE building
- Expand aprons when demand reached 80% of capacity
- Expand hangers to maximize capacity

Working Paper #3

Ervin presented the three Alternatives studied: Do Nothing/No Build, Minimum Development and Full Build Out. He explained that with the exception of the first Alternative, which is required as part of the FAA environmental assessment process should one be required, these Alternatives would be demand-based and any improvements would only be implemented if they provide a clear economic opportunity.

Ervin showed a map of the terminal area and identified possible areas for expansion if desired.

- No Build: He explained that in this Alternative, the Airport is maintained as is, and Master Plans typically include this option.
- Minimum Development: Here, if the Airport wanted to develop additional hangar space, it could be done in a way that would not extend any development closer to the runways. He pointed out that the Airport has an over-capacity of automobile parking, so this Alternative looks at redesigning that space and adding hangars - two larger corporate hangars and one smaller. Ervin emphasized that these are planning concepts, and so are not in any way detailed or final. This Alternative also adds a new entrance road, relocates the ARFF building, with all other facilities staying the same.

- Full Build Out: Ervin explained that this Alternative illustrates what could be done to maximize revenue. He noted that the concept is to create a plan so that buildings could be added as demand grows. This concept includes a new terminal, new corporate hanger space, new T-hangars, a change in the tower location to as to make more space for hangars, relocating the ARFF, making parking more compact, setting aside an area for compatible aviation activities, and creating a new entrance road.

Ervin said that as part of the developing the Alternatives, the study team looked at operations, fiscal issues and environmental issues. He explained that they will look at all these in more depth once they know which direction the state wants to go. He noted that in terms of Operational Performance, one important piece is evaluating factors that go into a Part 139 Certificate. The benefit is that this maintains high safety standards at not much cost. Most General Aviation airports do not have full time staff, but Groton-New London does and Ervin explained that it is in extremely good shape, that Airport staff have done an exceptional job with the resources available. If the Airport were to expand, there is plenty capacity and room for expansion if it was desirable.

Ervin talked about the criteria used to develop a Master Plan and the importance of using the Best Planning Tenets. He also noted that:

- The Airport's existing hangar capacity is more than sufficient, but things can change quickly and opportunities can arise unexpectedly. Through the Master Plan process, the state can understand where expansion can occur and react when an opportunity arises.
- The Airport had commercial service and it is important to protect that capacity in case it comes back.
- The highest and best use is revenue production from hangars and fuel sales.
- There is plenty of room for growth on the landside.
- This process will show if expansion is socially feasible, and it does appear to be environmentally feasible, but further work will be done to evaluate that.

Environmental

Ervin introduced Randy Christiansen, Stantec, to talk about the environmental process.

Randy explained that FAA and state need consistency in airport plans. They need to review plans so they understand what will be addressed and in what order. This is a planning level document, a screening process to make sure all pieces are in place and actions are feasible in the long run. In a screening level document, he explained that they do not quantify, but simply rate the scenarios based on potential impact.

The environmental factors evaluated are:

- Air quality
- Coastal Barriers
- Coastal Zone Management
- Compatible Land Use
- Construction Impacts
- Aircraft Noise
- Social Impacts
- Water Quality
- USDOT 4(f)
- Cultural Resources
- Biotic Communities
- Threatened and Endangered Species
- Secondary/Cumulative Impacts
- Light Emissions
- Natural Resources/Energy Supply
- Farmland
- Wetlands
- Floodplains
- Solid Waste
- Wild and Scenic Rivers

Randy reviewed Table 4.2 which shows shows an evaluation of the impacts for the three Alternatives.

Question: What are the socio-economic impacts of the Alternatives? Response: If the Airport has more FBOs, it will show a positive net effect for the community, and a negative impact would occur if the size and facilities of the Airport were reduced.

Fiscal Considerations

Ervin presented costs for the Alternatives, noting that these are rough planning level costs. He noted that the funding will come primarily from private development, with some allocation by the state and/or FAA depending on the project type

He indicated that the preferred Alternative should:

- Maintain to current high standards
- Maintain Part 139 Certification
- Generate revenue to cover operation and maintenance costs
- Look to Alternative 3 concept for
    - Planning
    - Promotion
    - Arrange for funding

Ervin then reviewed the facility upgrades contained in the Alternatives and explained what the trigger would be, i.e., at what timeframe or event the upgrade would occur. He reiterated that this is a demand-driven plan, not a "build it and they will come" plan. He noted that they are looking at 20 years down the road for these changes, not tomorrow.

Next Steps

Ervin reviewed the next steps, including the schedule for Working Papers and Meetings. He said the next step is a public information meeting so the public can get more involved and ask questions.

After gathering input from the Committee and the public, the state will decide on the preferred Alternatives, complete an environmental overview, and create Airport layout plans and financial plans, which will be included in the 4th working paper. All this will be combined into a Draft Master Plan. This will be presented to the public one more time, any final comments will be incorporated and the process will be complete. We intend to complete this final Master Plan the end of the year.

Questions/Comments:

Question: Can you provide a glossary of terms in the draft report?
Ervin: Yes, the first Working Paper includes an appendix with a glossary, and it is now on the website. (www.groton-newlondonairport-ampu.org/)

Question: Are you aware that there is other work being done at airport, a business plan, which is being worked on by the firm Louis Berger?
Ervin: Yes, we are aware of this and the work is complementary.

Question: Will this Working Paper we are looking at now be posted on the web site?
Ervin: Yes, in a week, and there is a link on the Airport website.

Question: You are going to make updates to the existing Working Papers, will they go back out to this group for comments?

Ervin: The revisions will be part of the information presented in the new draft; we will not be revising existing working papers.

Col. Jerry Lukowski asked if he could provide an overview of the role of the National Guard at GON. His remarks included such facts as:

- National Guard at GON supports army aviation
- Helicopter maintenance provided by 300 employees
- Guard has been here for 50 years
- The unconstrained plan includes a jump from 200,000 sq. ft. to 400,000 sq. ft., which would cost $135 million. This will have to be phased due to fiscal environment.
- Half would be upgrade to existing facilities; half would be a new location, potentially across the road.
- This would not take place until 2018 or later.
- The Airport is great to work with, and the Guard also works with NEPA, CEPA, EPA and DOT.

Questions included:

Q. What percentage of employees are civilians?
A. About 50-50.

Q. If you enlarged the facility to 400,000 sq. ft., how many employees would this add?
A. We do not know exactly, it is not proportionate.

Q. Do you need more ramp space or hanger space?
A. It is not about hanger space, we want to add shop space for maintenance work, painting, engine, corrosion, those kinds of activities. We could add a second floor, put all the administrative functions upstairs, and free up ground floor space for maintenance.

Q. My aircraft is tied down east of your area – can we extend our access so I can go directly to my tie-down space from the taxi area?
A. I would need to look at a map to answer that question.

Q. You made reference to across the street, and there is not a lot of land across the street. From a Groton perspective, you are very important and we want to address your needs, but do not see a lot of land. Are you looking at private land?
A. We want to have more buildable space next to the runway. We are looking 15 years out in terms of the parcel across the street. For closer space, on our property, we are looking at between 5-10 years in terms of expansion. We used to get funding every year and now we will be getting funding about every five years.

Q. What dictates the amount of aircraft you work on?
A. The Army makes that decision. The US is sectioned off and Connecticut gets east of Ohio and north of Georgia. We now maintain 200 aircraft and have to make sure the facility is improved as specific levels in order to get the work.

Ervin thanked everyone for attending.

The meeting closed at 2:45 pm.