

PSRC REGIONAL AIRPORT COMPATIBLE LAND USE PROGRAM UPDATE

January 6, 2010

This paper responds to questions and issues raised during the program update process. It was prepared to provide background and context as the project advisory committee continues its work.

What is the origin of the PSRC program? What are PSRC's roles and authority to address airport compatible land use?

PSRC's airport compatible land use program has existed since 1998, when we published our first guidance materials. This was in tandem with incorporating airport compatible land use as part of our formal plan review and certification process. Under GMA, our official role is to certify the transportation-related provisions of local comprehensive plans. (PSRC's Executive Board has adopted a process for reviewing local plans, which it last updated in 2003.) As you know, RCW 36.70.547 and RCW 36.70A.510 require local agencies to discourage the siting of incompatible uses adjacent to general aviation airports – which is then addressed in the multicounty planning policies in VISION 2040, adopted in April 2008. The primary goal of our program is to work with local planning staff to help them meet their planning mandates under these RCWs and regional policy. To meet this goal our program provides local member agencies with technical guidance materials (which we coordinate with the WSDOT Aviation Division) and an internal process for reviewing their plans.

What is the source of support for the current study? The current study we are launching arises from an earlier project, the Strategic Plan for Aviation (SPA), completed in 2002. The SPA outlined a set of issues and challenges facing the region's airport system, reviewed PSRC's interest and directives in addressing these issues, and laid out a 10-year work program for tackling the most critical of these issues. Airport compatible land use was high on the list. We then prepared a scope of work, received an FAA grant (which will fund 95% of the \$142,000 study cost) and selected a consultant. Mead & Hunt has strong credentials and extensive experience in Airport Compatible Land Use work, which is critical to this project. However, we designed the committee structure to ensure local planning input from our members. Together with the expertise of Mead & Hunt we have a great team.

The selection panel included local agency planners in an effort to insure we had input from the local planners throughout the process. The scope of work and other study information is available at: <http://www.psrc.org/projects/air/landuse/index.htm>. (You'll note work scope Task 7 is not included in the current project. This item was identified as a future work task pending additional FAA funding. If the study identifies new issues or the need for additional work tasks, PSRC staff can have discussions with FAA about funding new work under a future grant.)

Based on the results of the SPA study, as well as other discussions, PSRC's Boards have supported and endorsed this work, and authorized staff to accept the FAA grant and enter the consultant contract. As a footnote, recent presentations at our Transportation Policy Board and Executive Board on the Washington State Long Term Air Transportation Study (LATS) revealed strong interest in the issue of airport compatible land use as critical to the future of the state's airport system.

What does the PSRC program do, and how does it compare with the WSDOT program? Through the program that has been in place, we perform reviews of local comprehensive plans as they are amended or updated. This allows us to comment and provide feedback on how they're meeting the intent of state law and the regional program. These are also the key items being reviewed within the context of the current study.

With the study, PSRC is not proposing to introduce new mandates, regulations or requirements. We're simply reviewing key issues, assessing current plan status, discussing the possible need for updated guidance materials, and providing more clarity within our own plan review process. We'll be listening to the advisory committee, and incorporating their input, as we move ahead. We've designed our process to provide input from local agencies to prevent it from being a "top-down" process.

Regarding WSDOT's land use guidelines (developed in 1999), they were prepared by the state specifically to help local agencies plan around airports. PSRC has suggested that local member jurisdictions consider using these guidelines.

A key reason that the current project will add value is that the 1999 WSDOT guidelines were based on the CalTrans guidelines originally compiled in the 1990s. (CalTrans has subsequently updated their guidelines in 2003.) The WSDOT guidelines have not been updated since 1999; and the project provides an opportunity to look at what might be updated in our program and guidance materials. This does not mean we feel the WSDOT guidelines are deficient; only that after 10 years we think they should be reviewed.

Does the program include all airports in the region? Because all the airports in our region (with the exception of the two military airfields) have general aviation activity, they have been included in our program. Regarding McChord AFB and Gray Army Airfield, Pierce County, Lakewood, and Tacoma have been working to address noise and other compatibility issues for some time, so we also include these airfields in our program.

How will the PSRC program affect planning by airport sponsors? At the June 2009 meeting we discussed the possibility for airports to adopt their own master plans that provide more certainty for neighboring communities. From PSRC's perspective, this is a good idea and underscores the continuing need for ongoing dialog between airport sponsors and the communities surrounding them. Having this dialog is one reason why we've included both local agency planners and airport staff on our advisory committee. We see this project as providing a forum for state agencies, airport operators, and local member agencies to discuss ways of improving cooperation and avoiding conflicts.

Will the program define desired development around airports? Much of the literature related to airport compatible land use is focused on defining uses which are incompatible. There is indeed a need to identify uses which should be encouraged in the interest of preserving property values and economic development within adjoining communities. For example, the city of Burien has been implementing this concept in its Northeast Special Planning Area (NESPA) effort, and perhaps they can add to the conversation about this issue. This is one reason we invited Burien to join the project advisory committee.

What are the primary study products/outcomes? The work scope identifies several products and outcomes, including an evaluation of existing plans, revised guidelines, an updated internal process for PSRC plan review relative to airports, and implementation procedures. We plan to take this information to the Regional Staff Committee and policy boards for information and endorsement.

Are the Museum of Flight at Boeing Field and the Future of Flight Aviation Center at Paine Field consistent with WSDOT's Airport and Compatible Use Guidelines? The Museum of Flight at Boeing Field predates the WSDOT guidelines, but does meet FAA airport design standards regarding the building's relationship to the airport's primary and transitional surfaces. The FOF is an aviation-related use, similar to an airport terminal, which by definition needs to be close to the airfield. The WSDOT guidelines recommend the prohibition of residential land uses and Special Function land uses in Zones 5 and 6, where the FOF museum is located. All non-residential uses are permitted outright in zones 5 and 6. The Future of Flight Museum is neither a residential nor a special function land use, so our interpretation of the guidelines is that the FOF museum is a permitted use. Of course, because the WSDOT guidelines are only guidelines, local agencies have to make this call, which they did when they permitted the facility.