

T.F. Green Airport Master Plan and Environmental Impact Assessment

Study Resource Committee

Meeting Summary January 24, 2002

Introduction

Suzanne Orenstein, Facilitator, opened the meeting by thanking committee members for returning to the SRC process and reviewing the SRC purpose and procedures. Michael Cheston, Executive Director of RIAC, also thanked members for their commitment and attendance and provided some information about the impacts at T. F. Green that have occurred as a result of the September 11th attacks. He noted that safety and security have been the top priorities for the airport staff and RIAC Board. Because of the slowdowns in air service after September 11, RIAC's financial situation changed significantly. RIAC ended 2001 with a \$1 million deficit, which will be funded by an operations and maintenance reserve fund. Mike noted that there is a hiring freeze at Green, and that funds from planned projects were diverted to safety and security measures. He did note that over the entire year, (2001) RIAC's passenger growth was up two percent, but that was lower than the six percent growth than had been expected.

Mike introduced Mary Soderstrum, the new Deputy Executive Director for Engineering and Planning. Mary replaces Wayne Schuster as the RIAC manager for the Master Planning process. Mr. Schuster has resigned from RIAC to take apposition at Baltimore Washington Airport. Mary distributed recent data on airport operations for the post September 11 period, noting that the year's growth reflected unusually heavy traffic in August and September. Next, Mary described why the Master Plan process is important to the airport now, outlining her expectations for the plan. She noted it would be a blueprint for the future that will allow the airport to anticipate what its needs will be and plan its short-term projects with the longer-term plan in mind. She stated that adoption of a plan does not mean the facilities will be built, rather facilities will only be developed if they are justified environmentally and financially. Her goal for the plan is to develop trigger points that will signal when facilities are needed, which is more important than estimates of specific traffic volumes at specific years or times.

Several committee members made comments and suggestions after these introductory presentations.

- Bill DePasquale, representing the City of Warwick's Planning Department, noted that Warwick Mayor Avedisian had submitted a letter to Mr. Cheston suggesting certain Master Planning steps. He asked that:
 - The forecasts used for Master Planning be reassessed to incorporate information from Sept. 11 events.
 - RIAC consult with the City of Warwick on the feasible extent of off-airport development and depict this visually on a map.
 - RIAC help Warwick develop elements of a comprehensive plan for an airport environs zone, with noise overlays, building code recommendations for residences within the zone, and other appropriate conditions.
 - Extension of Runway 16/34 should be rejected as an option, because Warwick objects to further airport incursion into neighborhoods.
 - RIAC join the city in finding funding for an airport ombudsman position to manage airport community relations.

Mr. DePasquale asked the facilitator to circulate the mayor's letter to the full SRC.

- Other committee members asked that Mr. Cheston and Ms. Soderstrum add community impacts to the list of criteria for build out decisions regarding Master Plan components.

REPORT FROM QUALITY OF LIFE SUBCOMMITTEE

Rev. Duane Clinker, Chair of the Quality of Life Subcommittee, reported on two discussion sessions conducted by the subcommittee prior to September 11. A copy of the committee's draft report was provided. Rev. Clinker summarized the group's findings as follows:

- Many quality of life and community capacity elements can be measured.
- Many measurement areas, like noise and air quality, have been measured by RIAC in the past, but the information has not been accumulated and synthesized for public review.
- Other elements, like particulate matter in air pollution, real estate values, and educational performance, have not been measured at all.
- Among the positive RIAC accomplishments on quality of life has been the creation of jobs and willingness to study some issues even though they are not legally required to do so.
- Acquisition and sound proofing programs need to be sped up to address those most urgently affected by quality of life impacts.

Other committee members commented on the needs to improve attention to quality of life issues, especially noise impacts on schools, and the need for professional consultants to evaluate past data and develop measures of community capacity. A few members noted the need for more time for study of these and other measures, including a Warwick-recommended study of health impacts from the airport on surrounding neighborhoods.

Finally, Rev. Clinker asked that RIAC respond to these requests at the next meeting, or sooner.

DRAFT MASTER PLAN FORECAST RESULTS

John van Woensel, Landrum and Brown Project Manager for the Master Plan, introduced the Forecast discussions by providing a few overview comments. He noted that:

- The forecast data being presented this evening was developed before September 11. Landrum and Brown, with its consultant, Edwards and Kelcey, are developing an analysis of how the events of September 11 might affect the T. F. Green 20-year forecast. This analysis will be presented at the next SRC meeting, but in the meantime, reviewing the pre-September 11 numbers will be a needed first step for the SRC.
- The forecast data for T. F. Green was developed in two separate sections, after hearing SRC comments in July. The first is the usual demand-focused estimate of passengers and operations, which outlines the traffic Green could expect to arrive regardless of what facilities it builds. The second part of the Green forecast tries to estimate passengers and operations that might arrive given certain scenarios for limiting facilities to handle the passengers and flights. Landrum & Brown developed these scenarios based on suggestions from the SRC in July.

Doug Wilson, an economist from Edwards and Kelcey, presented the results of the market-driven forecast modeling. He reminded the committee of the factors included in the model, especially historical information, population growth, economic projections for the region, the community, and the airline industry, and Green's place in the regional airport system. Then he presented the results of the forecasting, which showed that a medium case growth scenario over 20 years would be 3.51 percent growth in passengers per year, and that an augmented growth scenario (assuming certain levels of economic and population growth, as well as some overflow from other airports) would be 4.15 percent annually. The medium case growth scenario would result in annual passenger levels of 10.8 million in 2020. The complete presentation is available on the Master Plan section of RIAC's web site (pvd-ri.com).

John van Woensel presented the results from an analysis that showed how the forecast for T.F. Green might vary if facilities were constrained by specific actions or lack of actions, such as reducing the length of Runway 16-34, which had been discussed in previous meetings. Landrum and Brown evaluated the impacts on the forecast of seven constraints, including prohibiting new flights, shortening Runway 16-34, closing Runway 5L-23R, no increases in airfield facilities, no increases in terminal facilities, no increases in landside facilities, and some small level of facility improvements. The only strategy that appeared to reduce growth significantly was the prohibition of new flights, and that strategy is extremely hard to implement. The federal government has deregulated the airline industry to allow airlines to determine what flights they will offer at what airports, and the airlines would not voluntarily stop adding new service at Green if the demand was there. There is a Federal government process, the Part 161 process that could study whether such restrictions could be implemented. No Part 161 process, out of the six attempted, has produced limits on new flights to date. Three processes were discontinued, and three are pending. Only one of those pending is at an airport with commercial service. Thus, this lengthy process is available, but not promising to date as a method of limiting flights. The complete presentation for this topic can be found on the RIAC web site (pvd-ri.com).

Among the comments on the forecast presentations were the following:

- If Runway 16-34 were shortened and not useful for commercial jets, it would have some effect on commercial capacity, because some carriers could refuse to service a single runway airport.
- The six-minute delay threshold used to estimate how passenger behavior would be affected by delay creates a bias in the evaluation towards passengers over airport neighbors. Is there a similar threshold for noise?
- Shortening Runway 16-34 will increase the frequency and/or risk of runway incursions by forcing small aircraft in certain weather conditions on to the main runway.
- Reducing passenger delay does not necessarily favor passengers over neighbors. Idling delayed airplanes can adversely affect neighbors as well as passengers.
- Traffic delays from the four-year construction project on the Washington Bridge should be factored into the forecasts.
- The SRC could benefit from more information about the Part 161 studies done elsewhere.
- Would like to see written corrections to forecast from these and future comments.
- Is it possible to show what growth would be accommodated by what expansion activities?

- Some of the conclusions about the impacts of the constraints on passengers and operations in the Runway 16-34 scenario seem counterintuitive.
- Doubling of traffic by 2020 regardless of what facilities are built is a sobering thought.

RIAC asked the committee to submit written comments to Mary Soderstrum by February 7. The comments will be incorporated into a revised forecast chapter, which will go out for review at least one week before the next meeting on March 5.

NEXT STEPS

Landrum and Brown distributed a preliminary draft of the Affected Environment chapter for the EIS that will be developed for near-term airport improvements that come out of the Master Plan. They noted that the chapter might help committee members see what would be evaluated during the EIS process, and cautioned that the EIS would evaluate the impacts of specific projects yet to be determined, not the Master Plan as a whole.

The committee agreed to put off discussion of how to bring an update on the Master Plan process to the public until it had more concrete ideas to discuss.

The next meeting will be held on March 5, 2002, at 5:30 p.m. at the Sheraton Hotel at the airport. (Dinner will be at 5:00 p.m. as usual.) The agenda will include:

- A review of the impacts on September 11 on the T.F. Green forecasts.
- A discussion of comments and changes from the committee on the forecast chapter.

After the March 5 meeting, both the RIAC Board and the FAA will need to review and agree on the forecast that will be used for planning purposes. After a forecast is finalized, the SRC will meet to discuss what it might mean for facility improvements, and what the action triggers might be for those improvements.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Paul Gibbs noted that, as a stakeholder in the Quonset Point collaborative process, he found that large volumes of information were not useful with the general public. He recommended the SRC develop summaries of the Master Plan products for use with the general public. He further noted that he has been impacted by airport noise significantly since the flight paths changed and that noise is the most difficult thing about the airport for residents like him.

Dave Mills asked several questions about progress on noise abatement issues. He asked when the AOMS system tracking actual flight paths would be operational and when the new noise contour maps would be developed. He also questioned whether his 400 noise complaints were missed in the development of the draft Affected Environment chapter of the EIS.

List of Attendees

SRC Members

Robert Blaikie
Mark Brewer
E. Colby Cameron
Tom Celona
Michael Cheston
Duane Clinker
Lindsay Commeau
William DePasquale
Dave Field
Kevin Flynn
Gerry Flynn
Charles Gaffney
Ron Gagnon
Scott Godfrey
Patti Goldstein
Raleigh Jenkins
Karen Kalunian

Tom Klin
Thomas Labrie
Al Lamothe
Bob Lamoureux
Gail Lattrell
Mark McKenney
Verna Pezzulo
Hope Pilkington
Peter Scotti
Paul Silva
Walter Slocomb
Mary Soderstrum
David Spengler
Robert Tingle
John van Woensel
Michael Walker

Public

Derek Andersen
Dennette Barnes
Joe and Joan Bennett
Ed Bratuz
Capt. C.A. Breen
Charles Brower
Mary Butler
Chris Doppke
David Edwards
Cathy Eakins
Kent Gates
Paul Gibbs
Peter Gray-Mullen

James Jarry
Catherine Lang
Norma Malachowski
Rep. Joe McFarman
Dave Mills
Dan Murphy
Sen. Elizabeth Roberts
Ahmand Shihadel
Sharon Traficante
Re. Joe Trillo
Don Winfield
Michael Zorum