

City officials target runway expansion

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City officials are hoping that a longer runway at Salem Municipal Airport will attract more business, so they plan to build one.

When complete, the 1,200-foot extension project will give current aircraft more flexibility and allow larger cargo and passenger planes.

The city and members of the business community maintain that a longer runway will make Salem more attractive to companies looking to relocate.

The extension project also solves a problem with the lack of funding to take care of deferred maintenance — and it leaves the door open for future passenger service.

"We are not competitive at 5,800 feet," said Salem Urban Development director John Wales. "Some of the corporate jets we have operating out of the airport right now cannot take off fully fueled in the summertime."

The two runways at Salem Municipal Airport are shorter than runways in cities with similar population. The expansion to 7,000 feet would make the airport comparable to Redmond and closer to Eugene and Medford.

"The extension will allow existing aircraft to maximize their fuel and passenger and cargo load that they weren't able to do previously," said Federal Aviation Administration spokesman Mike Fergus. "The Citations, Gulf Stream 4s, etc., mainly business jets, could not take off with full capacity with the existing runway."

High air temperatures can greatly increase take-off distance requirements due to thin air



DANIELLE PETERSON / Statesman Journal FILE

An aerial view of the Salem airport.

Runway lengths

The city of Salem is in the process of planning for a runway expansion project using mostly federal and state money.

Planners say the increase from 5,800 to 7,000 feet would make Salem Municipal Airport more attractive to businesses looking to expand or relocate Salem

Other runway lengths in Oregon:

Portland 11,021 feet

Klamath Falls 10,304 feet

Medford 8,800 feet

Eugene 8,009 feet

Redmond 7,040 feet

Salem 5,800 feet

density, he said.

"There are other technical factors as well, but (air temperature and aircraft weight) justify the extension since annual operations for these types of aircraft numbered about 1,500 plus."

A report by city planners stated the extension would allow for aircraft "as large as MD 80s or 737s to land if passenger air service is secured. "

The report also stated that about \$1 million in improvements are needed.

On May 9, Salem City Council instructed staffers to come up with a strategy to fund the extension.

The city is in the process of completing an environmental assessment and master plan which allows Salem Municipal Airport to get in the queue for as much as \$14.4 million in FAA funding during the next four years.

The FAA already has justified the need to expand, and with a longer runway comes the need for an upgrade to electrical, lighting and navigational systems, which takes care of the maintenance that has been put off.

The total project is expected to cost \$9 million to \$11 million.

The environmental study will be funded by a Connect Oregon grant from ODOT; completion is expected by the end of 2012. The FAA will not commit to funding the extension without a clean bill of health.

Planning would start this year and construction would begin in 2014.

Elements such as lighting systems, zoning and neighborhood impact will need to be considered during the coming months. The current recommended option would relocate some residents from under the flight pattern.

Local residents are encouraged to be part of the process, starting with the next Master Plan Open House at 6 p.m., Sept. 28 at the main airport terminal.

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