

Airport is vital to region's economy

Reader View

Wilsonville Spokesman, Wednesday, 18 December 2013

Written by Ben Altman

As an advocate for creating a strong local economy, the Wilsonville Area Chamber of Commerce takes great interest in the letter published in the Wilsonville Spokesman on Dec. 11 written by Ben Williams, president of Friends of French Prairie.

The chamber is strongly supportive of the Aurora Airport Master Plan, which was approved by the Federal Aviation Administration and the Oregon Department of Aviation. The expansion of the airport benefits our local economy in a number of ways. We would like to provide data that supports the multiplier effect of airport money that is in question in Williams' letter.

Hotels, restaurants, car services and other businesses located near the airport are financially benefited by airport operations. These financial benefits come through spending by business travelers, spending by businesses operating at the airport for goods and service and by the 999 people employed at the airport.

The most current financial data available showing the economic benefit of Aurora Airport for local businesses is reported in the 2007 Oregon Aviation Plan. Direct economic impact of Aurora Airport (OAP, table 8.27) data shows the value of family wage jobs and business sales directly attributable to activities at Aurora Airport:

Number of jobs: 999

Wages: \$25,923,000-\$35,000,000

Business sales: \$75,083,000

Workers do spend money in Wilsonville. Out-of-state workers stay in Wilsonville hotels and eat in Wilsonville restaurants. People working at the airport eat lunch at Wilsonville restaurants, buy food at Wilsonville grocers and use Wilsonville doctors, dentists, barbers and stylists. Our members report that airport workers with name badges and uniforms are seen at local coffee shops getting coffee, filling prescriptions at local pharmacies, frequenting local banks and having their autos serviced, repaired and washed in Wilsonville. Several companies at the airport bank at Columbia Bank, a Wilsonville Chamber member. Companies at the airport purchase goods and services from Wilsonville businesses. Companies at the airport needing catering services for meetings buy from Albertsons, Lamb's Thriftway and Costco.

Aurora State Airport does not support just the businesses located and operating at the airport. Many Wilsonville Chamber members, including Sysco Foods, Costco, Xerox, Coca-Cola, Les Schwab, American Medical Response, State Farm and FLIR Systems, use the airport for business travel. Business travelers use local hotels, restaurants, car

services, etc. This represents money from outside the south metro area coming into the local community. Direct visitor spending (OAP, table 8.24) data reports:

Total general aviation visitor arrivals: 59,213

Average spending per trip: \$143

Total spending by general aviation visitors: \$8,483,000

Business travelers visit companies at the airport for various reasons including visiting business aircraft, receiving flight training, purchasing business aircraft and having maintenance performed on those aircraft. These business travelers stay in Wilsonville hotels (Holiday Inn, Super 8, Best Western and La Quinta Inn) and shop and dine in Wilsonville. Two companies at the airport - Aurora Jet Center and Aurora Aviation - report they were directly responsible for expenditures of \$24,161.47 by business travelers during 2010 at the Holiday Inn in north Wilsonville. These visitors spent \$11,802 for 139 room nights and \$12,359.47 for food just at the Holiday Inn. These are but a few small examples of direct spending in Wilsonville.

Another benefit that the airport provides this region is attracting corporate headquarters and larger companies to Wilsonville that provide family wage jobs that benefit our citizens. Attracting larger companies to infill empty buildings in Wilsonville is one of the city of Wilsonville's top priorities. We know that companies have chosen to locate in Wilsonville in part because of the airport and the ability of executives to fly in and out of the region. Having an airport so close for corporate flights gives Wilsonville a huge advantage when competing with other cities who cannot offer a regional airport.

The airport and the many businesses located there are an important part of the south metro region economy and community. The economic arguments in support of airport expansion are indeed real and quantifiable.

Ben Altman is chairman of the Wilsonville Area Chamber of Commerce Economic Vitality Committee.