

Full Story About the Airport is not being told – Reader View

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In the past few months Pamplin Publications has run the article “Aurora State Airport: Finding Its Economic Footing” in both the Canby Herald and the Wilsonville Spokesman. Kudos to Pamplin Publications and Josh Kulla for keeping this important subject before the reading public and considering the views of opponents to expansion.

A few clarifications are in order! First, “continued public outreach” by the Wilsonville Chamber of Commerce and Oregon Department of Aviation have not helped quell “the louder voices that once expressed trepidation” about airport expansion and increased air traffic. The proponents of expansion have re-directed their efforts to purported economic benefits, such as building more jet hangars in anticipation of expansion, and related real estate development, and ignored the public process problems that have occurred—some of which are still simmering.

The points Friends of French Prairie and 1000 Friends of Oregon have made all along have not been “misinformation” as Bruce Bennett of Aurora Aviation stated. They have been facts, many of which were swept under the rug. Such as that the Oregon Aviation Board was presented with the first airport layout plan containing four alternatives, but the Preferred Recommendation that there be no runway expansion because of ag land impact, airport boundary complications and the overwhelming objections of community neighbors. Instead, the Board directed ODA to come back with a plan for expansion – which, of course, required coming up with a new set of data to justify the expansion. That is the misinformation in this saga, not anything on the FOFP web site! This was one of the main points made in a Reader View from Tony Holt, a member of PAAM and the Charbonneau Civic Affairs Committee. He addressed the assertion that aircraft noise problems have been resolved, saying: “Aircraft noise will be a continuing problem at Aurora....the problems have not gone away.” Last month before the Wilsonville City Council, Mitch Swecker, Director of ODA, conceded that the net effect of the tower and the expansion plans would be more bigger (mainly corporate) jets!

Those of us who oppose airport expansion for many reasons in addition to noise, are on record acknowledging safety benefits of an air traffic control tower. Our objections include loss of ag land directly south of the airport for expansion of the runway safety zone, which has the high probability of starting “aviation related” land development pressures west to the Aurora city limits. Marion County has a history (as has been demonstrated by the Helicopter Transport Services. development) of approving development with no infrastructure improvements or traffic mitigation. HTS employs over 100 people, and both Kiel Road and Airport Road are still two lane, with no left turn lanes—let alone a traffic signal. Why? Because they’re in Marion County.

And that brings us to the dual jurisdictional problem. The airport is in Marion County, and ODA only owns the runway, but while the majority of the problems like noise are incurred by Clackamas County

residents, the property tax revenue goes to Marion County. So, why worry? And speaking of employees and residents gets us to the problematic economics.

Very few of the owners of local aviation businesses live in Marion County, and neither do the majority of the employees at the airport. In fact the 2011 employment data definitively lists only 3.7% of Aurora Airport workers as Wilsonville residents. So, the majority of those workers do not spend much money in Wilsonville. Where, then, is the quantification of the so-called multiplier effect of airport employee money? It's not in French Prairie, and very little of it is in Wilsonville or even Canby. The majority of it ends up much farther afield, where the paychecks are deposited.

The other economic reality avoided by aviation boosters is how few citizens can afford aircraft, own aviation businesses or benefit from public airports. According to the General Aviation Manufacturer's Association, the total economic contribution of General Aviation to the US economy is less than 1%, and clearly non-business aircraft owners and also far less than 1% of the population! Friends of French Prairie's mission is to preserve agriculture land and promote local farming. The economic arguments in support of airport expansion are bogus and illustrate the gross imbalance between public expenditure (tax dollars) and private benefit (an industry which doesn't have to pay for its infrastructure!). In the case of aviation at public airports, the fact that the public expansion benefits so few interests actually causes negative income distribution effects. Winston Churchill, speaking about the debt owed to the Royal Air Force, once said: "Never was so much owed by so many to so few." In this case, as relates to public benefit and aviation expansion, it would read: Never has so much been provided to so few by so many!

Ben Williams

Friends of French Prairie

Aurora, OR 97002