



TALKEETNA PUBLIC MEETING NO. 3

OCTOBER 22, 2007

MEETING NOTES

SUBJECT: Public Meeting No. 3, Matanuska-Susitna Borough Regional Aviation System Plan (RASP)

DATE: October 22, 2007

LOCATION: Sunshine Fire Station 11-2

MEETING ATTENDANCE: Approximately 55 meeting attendees signed in, plus staff

MEETING MATERIALS: PowerPoint Presentation and Project Graphics

MEETING AGENDA

- 6:30 p.m. - 7:00 p.m. Open House
- 7:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m. Presentation
- 8:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m. Questions and Comments

OPEN HOUSE

The meeting started with a half-hour open house where attendees talked informally to project staff and Matanuska-Susitna Borough (MSB) staff about the project. The meeting boards placed around the room were grouped into two categories based on the two draft reports currently available (Draft Regional Aviation System Plan Report and Draft Airport Location Study).

PRESENTATION

Tom Middendorf and John Jones of DOWL Engineers (DOWL) gave a PowerPoint presentation that included a project update and an overview of the two draft reports.

COMMENT SUMMARY

The following pages contain a summary of the public's comments and questions. The comments and questions are from both the open house portion of the meeting as well as the question and answer period that followed the PowerPoint presentation. *The project staff's responses and comments are shown in italics.*

Draft Regional Aviation System Plan Report

- An audience member clarified that a picture in the PowerPoint presentation of a grass strip surrounded by conflicting land uses has actually been shut down for years. The airport was closed because of the surrounding land use conflicts.

The goal of the RASP is to avoid situations like this one.

- Does the draft RASP recommend the same regulations be applied to private airparks and commercial airports?

Yes. These two types of airports have very similar operations.

- Does the MSB have different property taxes for pastures and airstrips?

Brad Sworts with the MSB believes they are the same but will check.

- Why doesn't the Long-Range Transportation Plan address any of the issues raised by this study?

The LRTP focused mostly on roadway issues but briefly discussed some of the aviation issues included in the RASP. There was a common understanding that there would be a study in the future specifically to address aviation issues in the MSB.

- Would the proposed airport registration guidelines require another layer of government regulation?

Yes, the recommendations to register airports would be an additional step in the process of owning or building an airstrip.

- I am opposed to this plan for two reasons: more government and more taxes.
- The MSB requires two variances if a lot's length exceeds its width by a 3:1 ratio. Lots designed for airstrips usually require these. The MSB could deny these variances. The study should recommend the MSB's restrictive platting process be revised so that it is more aviation-friendly.
- The MSB should identify the economic impact of aviation.

Draft Airport Location Study

- What happened to plans that were discussed several decades ago to build a major international airport at Point MacKenzie?

At one time during the 1960's there was an airport reserve at Point MacKenzie, but the reserve was lifted so the land could be used for agricultural purposes. There are currently no plans to build an airport in that area.

- Does runway at the proposed Big Lake Airport line up with the floatplane pond?

Yes, it does.

- Do not designate 7-Mile Lake as a floatplane facility. It is one of the last undeveloped lakes in the MSB.
- The project team needs to be in touch with the Boy Scouts regarding planned airport reserves. The Boy Scouts own a large amount of land in the MSB, especially in the South Denali area.
- There were concerns about aircraft noise at the Boy Scout camps.
- *The project team reiterated several times the land reserves for airports at Miles 121 and 131 are merely concepts at this point. There are no plans to construct an airport in this area in the near future.*
- If this study has been underway for a year, why are the South Denali airport sites just now being mentioned?

It was a two-part study. The Airport Location Study is the second part, and these sites were identified in late spring 2007. At this point these sites are merely suggestions for reserves for future airports in the long-term planning period. There will be a great deal more public discussion if these potential sites are analyzed further.

- Did the tourism industry or the community of Talkeetna approach the project team about looking at airport sites in the south Denali area?

No, they did not. Discussions with National Park Service and MSB employees regarding the increased activity anticipated in the area triggered the project team to look at potential airport reserves in the area to accommodate the forecast activity. The South Denali Implementation Plan also forecasts growth in these areas.

- An employee of Princess Tours said he was surprised to hear plans about an airport in the area of South Denali. The tour company did not request an airport be constructed in the area.
- The Talkeetna Comprehensive Plan recommended construction of a floatplane pond. Why doesn't the list of new airport sites show a floatplane facility in Talkeetna?

The project team heard about a great deal of opposition to planned expansion of the Talkeetna Airport, and Talkeetna is 50 miles driving distance from the anticipated need.

- A new airport in the south Denali area would take business away from air taxi operators based at the Talkeetna Airport.
- Do not focus on tourism; focus on the needs of the communities. Tourists can drive to Talkeetna.
- Maybe the area needs a regional airport. The best location would be south of Trapper Creek.
- There are already too many airports. We do not need more.

- The Mile 121 site is near a subdivision with 200 lots.
- There is MSB land east of the Petersville Road, along the Susitna River, with a former airport site. It is about two to three miles east of Trapper Creek and might be a possible site.
- The South Denali Implementation Plan designates the area of Mile 121 and 131 for development of campgrounds and trail heads.
- The East-West Express snow machine trail is in the wrong place on the maps.
- There are existing snow machine and ATV trails at both the Mile 121 and 131 sites.
- The South Denali Implementation Plan designates a large parking lot at Mile 121.5.
- Consider preserving natural vegetation between the airport and highway when looking at airport reserves.
- Protect the scenic views of the valley and Denali.
- An airport in the South Denali area would spoil the visitor and tourist experience.
- Is there enough land near Miles 121 and 131 to accommodate the infrastructure required for a large airport?
- The land ownership siting criteria should consider proximity to private subdivisions.
- Look at constructing an airport on railroad property between Miles 162 and 168 to reduce conflicts with the private development in the areas near Miles 121 and 131.
- How does the project team define a “need” for a new airport in the south Denali area? There does not appear to be a large amount of development at this time.

The need is based on the large amount of private property in the area that could be developed to support predictions of large increases in tourism.

- Construction of a visitor center is planned at North Curry Ridge. An airport in the valley will create noise pollution and ruin the view from the visitor center.
- Maybe the study should consider where not to build an airport.
- People do not want another “Glitter Gulch” constructed in the South Denali area (in reference to the area just north of the Denali National Park entrance). The Planning Commission needs to look at how to develop healthy communities.
- Princess Tours does a lot of their business in-house rather than working with local businesses. An airport in the south Denali area would contribute to this by preventing tourists from passing through communities such as Talkeetna.

- The National Park Service representative at the meeting mentioned that Princess Tours has a conditional use permit to expand their lodge, and Holland America has discussed the possibility of developing land they own in the South Denali area.
- The National Park Service representative mentioned that in the comprehensive planning process, the Trapper Creek community has stated a desire to set aside land for a future airport.

The project team has heard members of Trapper Creek say they would not like to see an airport built too close to town because it could hinder future development in Trapper Creek.

- *The project team did not focus their efforts on identifying land for an airport reserve south of Trapper Creek because of the area's close proximity to the Talkeetna Airport.*
- The National Park Service representative stated that a Federal Overhead Flight Advisory Committee had been formed to address aviation noise and other issues generated by air traffic using Denali National Park.
- There should be more public outreach in the Trapper Creek area and with affected property owners.

The project team agrees this should take place as part of any follow-up studies if the MSB is still interested in considering a new airport.

- *The project team noted the public raised valid concerns about air traffic noise close to subdivisions and neighborhoods in the South Denali area.*
- The project team should look at areas east of the Parks Highway. There is enough land there for an airport reserve. Land on the east side is owned by the MSB and is a forest management area.

The project team understood that land east of the highway is designated for recreational use near Milepost 121 and 131, but will check again on the status of the land in this area.

- An audience member noted there are two planned subdivisions off the south end of the runway in Wasilla. He commented there could be conflicts between the subdivisions and the airport, including noise complaints. An airport reserve could help to avoid conflicts like this in the future.
- Planners should utilize the useful information available on the MSB website when looking at possible airport locations in the South Denali area.
- Typically helicopters conduct medivac operations from Trapper Creek. A new airport in the South Denali area would not be needed for medivac purposes; the current process works.

General

- How was this plan funded?

The FAA paid 95 percent of the cost of the Mat-Su Borough Regional Aviation System Plan Study, while the DOT&PF and MSB each paid 2.5 percent of the cost. The original intent of the study was to address land compatibility issues between aviation and non aviation land uses in the southern part of the MSB. A federal earmark for a floatplane base location study in the South MSB was given to the MSB. The MSB did not request the earmark. The MSB expanded the Airport Location Study to be a borough-wide evaluation of public airport sites.

- The comment period deadline needs to be extended.

The project team has extended the deadline to November 19.

The meeting concluded about 9:00 p.m. and informal discussion continued between the meeting attendees and project staff for a while afterwards.

Attached: PowerPoint Presentation