

MSB Regional Aviation System Plan and Location Study Draft Reports

Summary of Written Public Comments

During the MSB Regional Aviation System Plan and Location Study 3 sets of public meetings were held, one set at the beginning to help identify issues, a second set to review project alternatives, and a third and final set to discuss project recommendations and the draft reports. In addition the project had a web site, surveys, and an active Technical Advisory Committee.

The following document only addresses the public comments received at the third and final public meetings and the over 120 written public comments received on the draft MSB RASP and Location Study reports. Comments were made by email, letter and through comments sheets provided at the public meetings during a 6 week public comment period.

Comments are summarized below for each report. The summary does not repeat each comment word for word, but tries to capture the spirit of the comment and the number of times the comment was made (in parenthesis). The complete set of the comments can be found in the Appendices.

I. Location Study

Based on the comments, it is apparent that most commenters had a misunderstanding that the purpose of the study was to make immediate binding decisions about whether to build an airport, and did not understand that the study was only trying to ask whether an airport is needed and if any sites should be studied further and possibly reserved for future consideration. Most of the comments came from private individuals. Several organizations that commented in opposition to the development of an airport at mile 121 or mile 131 of the Parks Highway included:

- DNR Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation
- The Alaska Center for the Environment
- Friends of the Mat-Su
- Alaska Quiet Rights Coalition
- Mat-Su State Parks Citizens Advisory Board (only opposed Mile 131 site)
- National Park Service (expressed concerns but not outright opposition)

A. South Denali Sites

Mile 121/131 Site-Specific Comments Many commenters expressed suspicions of a behind the scenes effort from the tourist industry or others for an airport. Most felt an airport at Mile 121/131 would be incompatible with tourism, the visitor and cabin-owner

experience, and would harm the wilderness and habitat that the area is being used for. Some were upset that they had not been personally notified about the study. Comments on Mile 121/131 are listed below in the order of frequency. The top three comments were repeated over 40 times.

- An airport would diminish the visitor and recreation experience, particularly the visual, auditory and wildlife impacts in the area, and is incompatible with the planned hotels, visitor center, etc. (50)
- An airport would disturb remote property owners who recreate in the area because of the peace, quiet and wilderness. (47)
- Airport noise, development and pollution would degrade wildlife and the land. (41)
- An airport would degrade the scenic value along the highway on the south approach to South Denali and create another “glitter gulch.” (22)
- Need more public involvement from the non-aviation community, especially landowners and those who recreate in the area. Need for more public notice. (19)
- An airport that primarily benefits tourists or the tourism industry should not be built. (17)
- An airport would affect winter and summer trail access and parking areas along the highway. (15)
- The need for an airport in the Upper Susitna area is unclear and has not been demonstrated. (10)
- A new airport at Mile 121/131 would harm Talkeetna, Trapper Creek and other area businesses. (8)
- An airport is a waste of money and it will be difficult to fund construction and operation. (7)
- Is not consistent with prior comprehensive planning or the South Denali Implementation Plan. Prior studies have not supported the need for an airport. An airport should be considered in conjunction with these plans. (6)
- Support for planning for an airport in this area to create jobs, serve a growing area, for emergency landings, and for an adjacent floatplane lake. (6)
- An airport would create airspace use conflicts with the Talkeetna Airport. (3)
- DOWL’s maps do not show all of the residential development in the area. (3)
- If Denali National Park doesn’t need a public airport, why does Denali State Park? (2)
- Because of the short tourist season, the airport would be unused much of the year.
- Consider the needs of Light Sport Aircraft in the report.
- If airport is built, do it at Mile 131 because the tourists it benefits would suffer the most negative effects.
- Move the South Denali Visitor Center closer to the Park.
- Discourage flightseeing and reduce aircraft carbon emissions.

Other South Denali Sites That Should Be Considered Many commenters supported expanded use of the existing airport at Talkeetna. This and other options are listed below in the order of frequency.

- Expand or use the Talkeetna Airport instead of building a new airport. (29)
- Use existing Trapper Creek airports and helipads. No new airports are needed. (10)
- Another airport is needed, but at some other undefined location. (4)
- In the Trapper Creek area. (3)
- In the Talkeetna Y area. (2)
- Between Trapper Creek and Talkeetna. (2)
- Consider an old federal gravel strip, later used by the State at the end of East Susitna River Road and a state airport reservation exists at the east end of Devonshire Road. (2)
- Tourism industry should build their own airport, if one is needed. (2)
- Between Trapper Creek and Caswell Lake.
- Emergency strip at the foot of Ruth Glacier and/or along Petersville Road.
- Build a road from Talkeetna to Mile 130, a distance of 10 miles.
- Build an airport in Denali National Park.

B. South MSB

Fewer comments were made about the South MSB options. Except for several comments in support of 7 Mile Lake, the comments below were made only once.

- 7 mile Lake is the best option. (3)
- 7 Mile Lake has no road access or other infrastructure so it has no value for floatplane use. It would be costly to build.
- Does 7 Mile Lake have anadromous fish or waterfowl issues?
- Big Lake area is too congested for a floatplane base.
- Use the Big Lake Lodge for floatplanes because it already has facilities. Big Lake has commerce that will attract use of the floatplane facility.
- Support for Big Lake Airport site.
- Goose Bay site has too many environmental issues.
- Goose Bay has no buildings or commerce to attract use and is remote. Why would anyone go there?
- Potential for military airspace conflicts at Goose Bay.
- Wind problems at Goose Bay.
- Migratory bird conflicts at Goose Bay.
- This plan serves a long term Anchorage problem but not a short term MSB problem.
- The minimum floatplane lane length should be 5000 feet to accommodate a wide range of aircraft, payloads and temperatures and higher margin of safety. If unable to do this, then create a very clear and long approach/departure path.

C. Other Location Study Comments

- Support for more studies before a specific site is selected. (2)
- Consider safe operations as an evaluation criteria – accessibility for emergency response equipment, conflicts with towers or obstacles, air traffic congestion.

- Support for airport authority concept.
- An on-line form should be provided for public comments.
- Be clearer that this is a “preliminary study” and further work is needed.

II. RASP

There were fewer comments on the RASP than the Location Study. Most of the RASP comments supported additional MSB land use regulations and public input on new airport development. Most were concerned with airport compatibility with surrounding land uses. Some suggested that private airstrips should receive less land use regulation if they do not have commercial operations and were not developed as an airpark, while others disagreed. Comments are listed in the order of frequency.

A. Airport Compatibility

- MSB should have a Planned Unit Development or Conditional Use Permit process that governs private airparks, airstrips with commercial operations, private airstrips (not all agreed these needed as much regulation), and public airports. Most commenters noted this should be applied to new airports and some also commented it should be applied to changed layouts or operations at existing airports. (20)
- Airstrips should meet Title 27 lot and block platting standards. (16)
- Both existing and new airports should be regulated. (4)
- The FAA only addresses safety in the air; the MSB should address safety on the ground. (4)
- Support for land use permit regulating building of new airports, with public input. Should consider noise, safety and surrounding land uses. (3)
- All new airports should be subject to Planning Commission and/or Assembly approval. (3)
- Concerns about a private developer developing an airpark in Talkeetna. (3)
- Airports built since the RASP process began should be subject to any new requirements. (2)
- Private strips without commercial operations should have an easier administrative permit process, but it should include some sort of public comment. (2)
- Support for a land use permitting process for all airports and airport facilities in the MSB. (2)
- Support for a moratorium on new road system airstrips until a Planned Unit Development strategy is implemented. (2)
- Less standards/regulation for small single user private strips.
- The applicant should cover the costs of collecting public comments.
- Section 27 of the code currently requires a variance for platting an odd sized lot like an airport. The code needs to be amended to specifically allow for an airport without a variance.
- Compatibility with surrounding land uses should be considered in the platting process.
- Subdivision of land for airparks should be regulated by the platting board.

- A permit and/or plan should be required whenever property for an airport is subdivided.
- Platting and land use regulation are different. Plats are not updated often – its not an effective way to notify people. Notifications about land uses are not a function of plats.
- There have been no accidents at the sites where development is built up at the end of an airstrip.
- More work is needed, before detailed solutions/implementation is completed. More education of the public and elected officials is needed.
- Airports are built along easements and rights of way where utilities have the right to construct airport obstacles – utilities should cooperate and avoid conflicts.
- Let the private property owner, not the government, evaluate the risks of terrain, power lines and other factors and determine whether to build an airport.
- New neighbors to existing airports have no rights to complain about the airport.
- Zoning or other considerations should be the focus of the RASP.
- The report favors MSB regulation over the needs of small airstrip owners.
- The MSB should offer the opportunity for public comment for all new airports and airstrips.
- A simpler public process with opportunity for public comment should be offered for airports off the road system.
- Support for disclosure of airport locations to the development community.
- Support for antenna farms concept.
- Support for controlling land uses around airports.
- Have not been aircraft accidents at the sites noted where there is development too close to the airport.

B. Other RASP Comments

- Support for an Aviation Advisory Board. (4)
- The Aviation Advisory Board member qualifications should be defined and should include more than just aviation interests. (3)
- Complements on the conduct of the meetings, the planning process and/or the recommendations. (2)
- Implement the Aviation Advisory Board as the first step.
- Support for lights-on recommendation.
- Support for use of common use radio frequencies.
- Support for ongoing coordination with the military on procedures, routes, and schedules.
- Support for more community meetings to educate about the importance of aviation.
- The report inadequately addresses economic impacts of aviation in the MSB.
- Airport regulation, oversight and ownership should be handled by the State, who has the expertise. Ownership by an authority could be an option.
- Support for FAA airspace determinations.

- The FAA airspace determination letter should be clarified to clearly state it does not certify the safety of persons and property on the ground. The RASP should also note this.
- Add Carol's Heliport to the airport mapping.
- Thank you for extending the comment period.
- State law prohibits regulation of private strips.
- Interest in applying some RASP principles to the Denali Overflight Advisory Group.
- Report could be made less technical.
- General support for RASP recommendations.