

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The second phase of the Matanuska Susitna Regional Aviation System Plan is the siting and conceptual layout of additional public airports in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, with the focus on sites with access to the road system.

This Airport Location Study report includes an overview of 10 existing public airports owned by the State of Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities and the Cities of Palmer and Wasilla. It also identifies the 25 privately owned airports and seaplane bases that are available for public use. Most of these privately owned facilities are seaplane lakes or small or remote airstrips.

The Airport Location Study identifies the demand for new airport facilities through a review of prior studies that evaluated demand and through an evaluation of growth areas in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Prior studies have mostly focused on the fact that existing airports in Anchorage cannot meet Anchorage's current and forecasted demand for floatplane slips. This is relevant to the Matanuska-Susitna Borough because some airport sites in the southern Matanuska-Susitna Borough could potentially serve both Matanuska-Susitna Borough and Anchorage residents. Prior studies also concluded that there was no need to build an airport in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough to replace or supplement Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport.

The analysis of future population growth suggested that the primary growth areas are in the South Matanuska-Susitna Borough area and in the Upper Susitna area. The South Matanuska-Susitna Borough area is where the highest concentration of population growth is already under way and expected to continue. The Upper Susitna area is anticipated to grow as a result of tourist-related facilities recently constructed and major tourist facility expansion expected over the next five to twenty years.

The Airport Location Study recommends a floatplane facility in the South Matanuska-Susitna Borough area with a water runway length of between 4,000 and 5,000 feet with associated space for tie-downs and lease areas. Ideally, it should be aligned with winds in generally a north-south alignment. For maximum use and flexibility, it should initially include a gravel strip for wheeled

aircraft and should have the flexibility to ultimately be expanded to a paved instrument flight rules runway of up to 6,000 feet in length.

Because the Talkeetna Airport meets the current needs for a public airport in the Upper Susitna area, the long-term need for another airport is somewhat speculative and other site alternatives for a future public airport lack public support, preliminary siting of an airport should not be made at this time. The site at Mile 131 should not be reconsidered in any future studies. The site at Mile 121 may be reconsidered by other future planning studies in the region if the need for an airport becomes clearer.

The Airport Location Study evaluates a wide range of methods to address the demand for new public airports in the South Matanuska-Susitna Borough and Upper Susitna areas:

- Do nothing - let private facilities address the need
- Upgrade existing public facilities
- Develop a floatplane facility at a non-lake site
- Develop a floatplane facility on an existing lake

Over 23 sites were evaluated in the South Matanuska-Susitna Borough area in an initial screening evaluation. The initial screening primarily considered airspace, land/water suitable for the airport, surrounding compatible development, driving distance to Palmer/Wasilla and Anchorage, road condition, and availability of public land for the airport. Most of the sites were west of Palmer/Wasilla and south of Big Lake where much of the population growth is occurring, there are many existing lakes, and the population density and residential development may not yet be so great as to prevent construction of an airport. Of the original 23 sites identified, three were recommended for further evaluation:

- Upgrade and add a floatplane pond at the existing Goose Bay Airport
- Upgrade and add a floatplane pond at the existing Big Lake Airport
- Construct facilities for wheeled aircraft and develop a floatplane base at Seven Mile Lake.

Over 10 sites were evaluated in the Upper Susitna area in an initial screening evaluation. The initial screening used similar evaluation factors as South Matanuska-Susitna Borough sites, but its focus was more on meeting the needs for an airport for wheeled aircraft and it considered

driving distance to the Upper Susitna area. Of the original 10 sites identified, two were recommended for further evaluation:

- A site near Mile 121 of the Parks Highway
- A site near Mile 131 of the Parks Highway

The Airport Location Study includes possible layouts and a more detailed evaluation and cost estimates for each of these sites. Some sites have more than one possible layout. The following is a summary of the evaluation of each of these sites.

Table 1: South Matanuska-Susitna Borough Airport Location Alternatives - Detailed Analysis

Evaluation Factors	Goose Bay Airport (new pond)	Big Lake Airport (new pond)	Seven Mile Lake
Airspace	Good	Good	Good
Winds	Poor	Fair	Good
Topography	Good	Good	Good
Geotechnical Data	None	Some	None
Land Ownership	Good	Good	Good
Land Use	Good	Fair	Good
Driving Distance/Road Access	P- 33 mi W- 20 mi A- 27 mi*/Good	P- 28 mi W- 15 mi A- 29 mi*/Good	P- 37 mi W- 24 mi A- 22 mi*/Poor
Utilities	Fair	Fair	Poor
Environmental Impacts	Few	Some	Many
Public Support	Minimal	Some	More
Conceptual Layout Runway Length**	W - 4,000' L - 5,000'	W - 4,000' L - 6,000'	W - 6,000' L - 6,000'
Cost: Short-term/Long-term	\$27M/\$26M	\$28M/\$55M	\$37M/\$38M

* With Knik Arm Crossing

** W = Potential length of floatplane (water) runway; L = Potential length of land runway

Table 2: Upper Susitna Alternatives – Detailed Evaluation

Location	Mile 121 of Parks Highway	Mile 131 of Parks Highway
Airspace	Good	Good
Winds	Good	Good
Topography	Good	Good
Geotechnical Data	None	None
Land Ownership	Good	Good
Land Use	Fair	Poor
Driving Distance/Road Access	11 miles/Good	1 mile/Good
Utilities	Poor	Poor
Environmental Impacts	Many	Many
Public Support	Minimal	Minimal
Conceptual Layout RW Length	6,000'	6,000'
Cost: Short-term/Long-term	\$25M/\$29M	\$25M/\$29M

If the Matanuska-Susitna Borough or others are interested in new airports in the South Matanuska-Susitna Borough or Upper Susitna areas, these sites should be evaluated further.

Additional engineering and environmental evaluations would include:

- Wind data.
- Topographic and geotechnical data.
- Environmental studies.
- More focused public input on these final sites with an emphasis on potential airport users and adjacent residents.
- A Master Plan and Airport Layout Plan for the final selected sites.

The final chapter of the Airport Location Study addresses options for airport ownership and operation, including possible airport ownership by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Also addressed is the possible formation of an airport commission or airport authority to operate the airport. This would be most applicable where multiple airports are operated together by one entity.