



PUBLIC MEETING NO. 2

WILLOW LOCATION

MARCH 26, 2007

MEETING NOTES

SUBJECT: Matanuska-Susitna Borough Public Meeting No. 2
LOCATION: Willow Community Center
MEETING ATTENDANCE: Approximately 50 attendees, including staff
MEETING MATERIALS: PowerPoint Presentation and Project Graphics

MEETING AGENDA:

- 6:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m: Open House
- 7:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m: Presentation
- 8:00 p.m. to 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 around several stations. The station topics included:

- Airspace, Communications and Inventory
- Airport Compatibility and Templates
- Location Study
- Survey/Comments

PRESENTATION:

Tom Middendorf and John Jones of DOWL Engineers (DOWL) gave a PowerPoint Presentation that included a project update, a summary of key issues and possible solutions identified to date, and an overview of the airport and floatplane facility siting study.

COMMENT SUMMARY:

The following pages contain a summary of the public's comments and questions. The summary includes comments and questions 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.*

Airspace, Communications and Inventory

- Why aren't all registered airports (both public and private) shown on the sectional? *There is an obligation to show all public-use airports first; if all the private-use airports were charted, the sectional would be extremely cluttered. It is up to the cartographer who creates the sectionals to decide which private airports to show. The project team for the RASP has recommended additional mapping of private strips in the Alaska Supplement.*
- Because there are so many private airstrips built close to each other in the MSB, more needs to be done to improve communication and safety. If every airport owner registered their airstrip they would get their own pattern. This would be beneficial to those airstrips located extremely close together.
- All the registered airstrips and associated frequencies should be posted on the MSB website.
- Pilots need to use their eyes; not all aircraft are radio-equipped.

Airport Compatibility and Templates

- The MSB passed an ordinance stating any planned development over 480 square feet must have a MSB permit.
- Concerned the MSB is encroaching more and more on individual rights, and that the MSB would tax airports that are registered in the MSB. *As more private airstrips are built in the MSB, conflicts between airports and between airports and their neighbors could increase. The MSB is trying to decide how to protect airports while acknowledging that some people do not want any government interference.*
- Regulation may be appropriate for airports that serve a large number of aircraft (at least 5), but it does not make sense to regulate small private airstrips. *Project staff agreed that big airports and little airports should be treated differently and are currently working within Technical Committee meetings and with the MSB to figure out how to define the threshold between small and large airports.*
- There are 63 non-pilots for every pilot in the MSB, so it is important the aviation community's concerns are heard and represented fairly.
- Plan could suggest that floatplane operators use common sense and not operate their planes at odd hours (such as midnight) unless they have a valid reason.

- Floatplane operations do not always get attention in lake management plans. *Project staff mentioned if an aviation advisory board is created for the MSB, they should participate in any aviation discussions on lake management plans.*
- Do not regulate private individuals operating floatplanes on lakes.
- An airport owner in the audience said he would not want to cut down the trees near his runway to meet the project staff's proposed template guidelines. *Project staff explained the current proposal is to "grandfather in" existing airports; new airports would be subject to the proposed templates.*
- Check with the Seaplane Pilots Association on federal laws preventing the closure of seaplane bases.
- Use common sense in solving airport safety problems.

Location Study

- How would a floatplane facility be funded? *It may be possible to get up to 95 percent of the facility construction funded by the FAA. State funding for a floatplane facility would be hard, but not impossible, to obtain. DOT&PF usually puts funding priority on airports off the road system where the airport is the primary access point. It is easier to get funding to build a facility than it is to find an organization to pay to operate and maintain the facility.*
- The MSB needs to stay out of the aviation business; let the private sector provide for floatplane base needs. *The floatplane siting study will evaluate the pros and cons of the MSB owning and operating a floatplane facility.*
- Did the project team look at Jacobsen Lake near the Wasilla Airport as a potential floatplane pond? *Yes, Jacobson Lake was considered. Also the most recent Wasilla Airport Master Plan also looked at this lake as a potential floatplane facility. It was determined designating the lake as a floatplane facility could create conflicts between floatplanes and aircraft using the Wasilla Airport.*
- A commercial floatplane base with fueling facilities is needed.
- Floatplanes are often unwelcome at lakes surrounded by private lots due to noise issues. These types of lakes do not make good candidates for the floatplane facility location study. However, people who live on lakes need to recognize that the lakes are used to serve a variety of interests, from boats to floatplanes.
- Dredging a lake to be used as a floatplane pond would be expensive. *Tom explained that 95 percent of airport improvements could be funded by the FAA.*
- If someone owned an area of swampland that could be dredged for a floatplane facility, would the MSB help them get a wetlands permit? *A private party could talk to the MSB to see if they would support this.*

- Would the MSB be interested in leasing out a floatplane facility to a private entity? *The MSB may consider leasing floatplane facilities to private individuals.*
- *Steve Pavish pointed that it is quite common for government entities to build facilities with federal funds and then contract with private individuals to maintain the facilities. The benefit is a government entity can get federal funding whereas a private individual could not. However, the MSB and the operator would both have to get liability insurance.*
- Could a floatplane pond be dredged parallel to the runway at the Willow Airport? The advantage of this would be no private homes around the new pond, unlike the situation at Willow Lake.
- Consider a floatplane pond next to the Talkeetna Airport. Neighbors at Christiansen Lake want fewer aircraft operators and do not want flights schools operating on the lake.
- Regarding a new airport in the South Denali area: is this private land? *The project staff would try to find a site on public land.*
- Add a map further north of the South Denali Visitor Center that shows the Summit Airport.
- An airstrip for wheel planes is needed in the South Denali area; would be good to dredge a floatplane pond parallel to the road, away from the lodges.
- If a new airport/floatplane facility is constructed in the South Denali area, a flight corridor that follows the highway should be designated to minimize noise impacts.
- Because of residential development around lakes, dredging a pond may be more realistic.
- Might solve problem of hauling planes across the road at Willow if the highway is relocated outside of town. (DOT&PF has discussed this option for several of the towns on the Parks Highway.)
- Stephan Lake has east-west winds.
- Regarding potential floatplane lake in the Eklutna Flats: will water level be affected by tides? Saltwater?
- Seven-Mile and Three-Mile Lakes look like best options.

Other Comments and Questions

- Issues resulting from aircraft crossing the highway between the Willow Airport and Willow Lake could be reduced if the Knik Arm crossing is built; this would relieve some of the traffic using the portion of the Parks Highway in the Willow Area.
- According to the Seaplane Owners Association website, a lake with historical use of floatplane activity cannot be closed to that use, except by federal action.

- Does not agree with fencing in the Talkeetna Airport – it is too small a town for that. Appropriate signage should be enough.
- Airports off the road system should be considered too. Some areas such as along the Yentna River have a high concentration of airports; some of which have conflicting airspace.

The meeting ended at about 9:00 p.m. and informal discussions continued between the meeting attendees and project staff.

Attachment(s): PowerPoint Presentation

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