



Environmental Assessment – Adjacent Land Owner Meeting Minutes

Date: November 4, 2015 – 6:30 PM
Location: Durango-La Plata County Airport (DRO) Conference Room
AIP Project: Environmental Assessment
Subject: Coordination Kick-Off Meeting

In Attendance:

Mary Anne Alexander
Byron J. Alexander
Jennfier Brann
Jerrid Brann
Linda Dalton
Kevin Hronich
Billie Huston
Jaren Jacobson

Jolene McCaw
Allen McCaw
Meghan McCaw
Paul McCaw (McCaw Cattle)
Jerry McCaw
Steven Thibodeaux
Craig Williams
Martha Nelson

Airport Staff

Kip Turner
Tony Vicari
Lise MacArthur

Airport Commission

Rich Bechtolt

Consulting Team

Colleen Cummins, Jviation

1. Welcome/Opening Comments

Colleen Cummins opened the meeting by welcoming and thanking everyone for attending. She introduced herself and her affiliation with Jviation – DRO’s consultant. Jviation has been working with DRO, the City, and the County on the Master Plan since mid-2013 as well as engineering projects. Colleen asked everyone to introduce themselves.

The purpose of the meeting was to introduce the upcoming terminal project to adjacent land owners as we move through the environmental process. Colleen noted that the Environmental Assessment was recently kicked-off and it is important to discuss the project with land owners, agencies, and other involved parties at start. Meetings were held earlier today with the Southern Ute Indian Tribe and other agency representatives.

Colleen reviewed the meeting objectives:

- Awareness of the Master Plan Recommendations (Proposed Action)

- Understanding of the Environmental Assessment (EA) purpose and content
- Familiarity with the EA process and opportunities for coordination
- Knowledge of the project's next steps

2. Purpose of Environmental Assessment (EA)

Colleen noted that the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is a procedural law that applies to federal agencies (in this case the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)). The EA is required to meet NEPA guidelines and provide informed decision making by federal agencies. The overall purpose is to determine if the proposed project would significantly impact the environment.

She also explained that the EA would identify a purpose and need based upon the information contained in the current Master Plan and that alternatives reviewed and analyzed in the Master Plan would be carried forward into the EA.

3. Master Plan Recommendations

A brief overview of the Master Plan recommendations was given by Colleen including the approved aviation forecast, facility requirements, and the Master Plan's preferred alternative – construct new terminal on east side of airfield. This would also include other infrastructure such as apron and taxiway development, on-airport circulation, auto parking, rental car parking, and employee parking. She continued by stating based upon the analysis completed as part of the Master Plan and the coordination effort completed that DRO, the Airport Commission, Planning Advisory Commission (PAC), Consultant (Jviation), County, and City decided this was the best alternative to move forward for long-range plans.

However, it was emphasized that going into the environmental process, reasonable alternatives will be evaluated as well – including renovating existing building and constructing a new terminal on the west side. Other options were considered during the Master Plan but deemed not feasible for a number of reasons (see Master Plan page at www.flydurango.com for additional details).

A brief review of the terminal timeline was given detailing the EA (2015 – 2017), design (2018-2019), and construction (2019-2021) durations.

Questions from meeting participants:

- a. How was the preferred alternative selected in the Master Plan without going through the environmental process?

The Master Plan included quite a bit of environmental baseline data – wetland survey, endangered species survey, hazardous materials, cultural resource survey, and noise and air quality analyses. These initial surveys did not indicate that a significant impact would occur with the alternatives considered. The NEPA process reviews the environmental impact at a much deeper level.

- b. So three alternatives are being evaluated in the EA?

Yes, the three build alternatives from the Master Plan will be carried forward into the EA, as well as a No Action alternative. The next meeting will include a detailed review of the alternatives.

- c. Will CDOT be involved in the EA process?

Yes, both the Aeronautic Division of CDOT and Road Division will be included in the process.

4. Environmental Assessment Process

Colleen explained the EA process from preparation through documentation and that we were currently in the preparation phase – Purpose and Need, Identification of Alternatives, Alternative Analysis, and Affected Environment. Public outreach, agency, and tribal coordination will occur throughout the process and as the process advances it is typical for additional groups to become involved.

Field work associated with the affected environment portion won't begin until April due to weather related issues. Impacts will be reviewed following field work, surveys, and preliminary design.

A figure was shown detailing the direct study area for the EA. This study area includes the entire airport boundary, as well as the portion of State Highway 172 that may be included as part of a new airport entrance. An indirect study area is also included as part of the process which includes adjacent property owners such as those in attendance.

A brief overview of impact categories was reviewed and an explanation given for those that will be briefly discussed and dismissed – coastal resources, floodplains, and wild and scenic rivers – as not present within the study areas. Areas of focus include wetlands, cultural resources, endangered species, noise, and secondary/socioeconomic based upon data gathered during the Master Plan.

Colleen noted that wetland impacts were unavoidable due to the extent of wetlands located north of the runway, in the area where the new entrance road is proposed. Additional wetland survey work is included in this EA as is coordination with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Cultural resources sites were identified during the Master Plan process. These areas will be further evaluated to determine their eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) and tribal importance. Extensive coordination with tribes is included as part of the EA.

Potential habitat for two endangered species was also identified during the Master Plan. The EA includes additional field surveys to determine if the species are located within the project boundaries.

Questions from meeting participants:

- d. Why is the study area including a T-shaped area along Highway 172?

The new entrance would require improvements such as turn lanes along 172.

- e. Would impacts to livestock and county roadways be included in the assessment?

Livestock impact is not a specific category within the EA but other impact categories such as Socioeconomic and Secondary review potential impacts to adjacent property owners, businesses, roads, etc. For example, a traffic study is included as part of the process to analyze existing and future demand. The information will be used to analyze potential impacts to surrounding properties and roads.

Please see the supplemental answers document for further discussion.

- f. If the terminal would be relocated to the east side would there be visual impacts to properties on that side due to light?

An architectural sub-contractor, RS&H, is on the team to analyze this area.

Please see the supplemental answers document for further information.

- g. If 40 acres of pavement are added to airport, how will stormwater runoff be addressed?

Per state/federal regulations, runoff quantities cannot increase. Design of the additional paved areas will include something, i.e. detention area, to prevent an increase in runoff. This will be evaluated during the preliminary design element of the EA.

- h. Would the proposed airport entrance road go through the wetland area on the north?

Yes, the new road alignment would impact those wetlands.

- i. Will water drainage be changed by a new road? Will water still run east as it always has?

Constructing the new road will require the need to construct proposed drainage features such as culverts to allow the conveyance of drainage underneath the road. Consequently, the water will still drain to the east.

- j. During construction of 309A some properties lost their wells that had been servicing their house for 30 plus years and had to drill new wells. Concerned that the new entrance road will impact the recharge area of their wells.

Impacts to water quality and ground water are considered as part of the EA document and any impacts to existing wetlands, streams, etc. would be mitigated. Drainage from existing areas would be reviewed during preliminary design.

- k. As part of the Master Plan process, a study reviewed the location of raptor roosting areas and nests and noted that the large trees used for roosting could be removed to prevent roosting in the future. Would like to know U.S. Fish and Wildlife's thoughts.

A copy of the Biological Resource survey will be sent to the USFWS per their request during today's earlier meeting and coordination with the agency will be on-going throughout the EA process and documented in the report.

- l. Is our involvement in this process important?

Yes, it certainly is important. The EA process is meant to be an open and transparent process. Input from the public, as well as agencies, is taken into consideration throughout the duration of the process.

- m. Is this EA appealable or non-appealable? It has to be determined up front and made clear to the public as it is my understanding per the U.S. Forest Service NEPA process that if you become involved early and sign your name you have a better seat during the appeal or objection period.

Unsure of this process and have not experienced working with the FAA. The U.S. Forest Service may use a different process to meet NEPA regulations. Colleen will coordinate with FAA for clarification.

Please see the supplemental answers document for further discussion.

- n. Are decreasing property values considered in the EA? And if not, what process does?

Unfortunately, the NEPA process does not consider impacts to property values as part of the process.

- o. Who is funding these studies (Master Plan and Environmental Assessment) and why are we paying for these studies if tax payers haven't voted on the project (i.e. to spend \$140 million)?

The FAA, CDOT, and DRO funded the Master Plan and are funding the EA process. The FAA requires a Master Plan to be completed to determine an airport's needs over the next 20 years and the EA is necessary to determine if any significant environmental impacts would occur from specific development items.

Airport funds used to pay for studies and projects come from user fees and not tax payer dollars.

The proposed development is estimated to cost approximately \$85 million when built, of which between \$35 and \$40 million will be requested from the community.

The entire 20-year buildout is estimated at approximately \$131 million. However, it is important to keep in mind that future development will only occur when needed which may be more than 20 years.

Please see the supplemental answers document for further discussion.

- p. Concern that by the time the terminal is built it will already be five years out of date because project was scaled back to meet current demand.

The Master Plan took a 20-year and beyond view when the preferred alternative was selected. Consequently, the east side was selected as it best meets the long-term development of the airport and community as the airport is a community asset. Therefore, the project was scaled back to make it affordable for today's needs with the intent of expanding in the future without having to ask the community for additional dollars.

- q. How are impacts that have already occurred being addressed? Irrigated land has been impacted. Are you going to look back at the airport's impact over the past 20 years?

As part of the process the document will include a section called "Cumulative Impacts". This section reviews projects and their impacts from the prior three years and future five years in conjunction with the projects included in the current EA to ensure a significance threshold is not passed.

- r. How will access drives be replaced when they are overrun by the new road off of 172? Will we still have our driveways?

The EA will include preliminary design to look at your access.

- s. Won't the increased use of the airport and the larger aircraft lead to more noise?

A noise analysis will be completed as part of the EA process. It will look at existing (2015) operations and future (design plus 5 years) operations (aircraft type and number of operations). As noise, based upon FAA's guidelines, is not currently an issue at the Airport, it is not anticipated to be an issue in the future.

- t. We're tired of the military aircraft operations at night. Are the military branches involved in the EA process? Are their future plans for airport use going to be included in this document?

All users of the Airport are welcome to participate in the process; but the military is not specifically contacted for involvement.

Please see the supplemental answers document for further discussion.

- u. Was relocating the airport considered? Could we move to Red Mesa?

The FAA has invested a significant amount of funding into the current airport and it would require their approval to move it to a new location. It has been done in the past but very rarely and for extenuating circumstances that could not be overcome in the airport's current location. Relocating Durango's airport is not a feasible alternative as it has a significant amount of

useable infrastructure and room to expand. Constructing a new airport on a greenfield site would not be feasible due to the amount of environmental impacts and costs.

- v. A parking garage was considered on the west side in the Master Plan. How can that be? The prior airport manager told me that from the center of the runway out there are height restrictions. How many miles away is this parking lot going to be?

Yes, there are height restrictions and the further away from the runway the higher a structure can be. It is best to think of it as a football stadium – the runway is the field and the imaginary surfaces controlling height climb out and up as does stadium seating.

Please see the supplemental answers document for further discussion.

- w. How much land does the airport own on the west side down toward the south?

Colleen and Kip demonstrated on aerial photo in room.

Please see the supplemental answers document for further discussion.

- x. In the EA process, it is quite apparent that constructing a building on the west side of the runway is going to have far less environmental consequences than distributing new ground. How will that be weighed against the Master Plan decision in the EA?

The NEPA process does not solely evaluate the amount of disturbance; rather, it has to do with the amount of impact to the identified categories and whether or not those impacts are considered significant. Significance thresholds by category are identified in the FAA's Order 1050.1F, Environmental Impacts: Policies and Procedures.

Consequently, although there may be more disturbances with one alternative over the others, if a threshold is not surpassed, i.e. impacts can be mitigated, and that alternative best meets the purpose and need then it would be allowed to move forward as the preferred alternative in the EA.

So in relation to DRO, if some of the cultural resources sites on the east side are found to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places that does not mean the alternative cannot move forward. The objects would be removed from the site and the proper mitigation process followed thus not crossing a significance threshold.

- y. But you've already impacted the west side. If you tear the existing building down and build a new one you've already impacted this side of the runway. You've already impacted one of those thresholds right off the bat. Am I looking at that wrong?

The EA looks beyond disturbed versus undisturbed property on the airport – it includes the 'need' and the reason behind why it should move. It goes back to the planning process - the long-term

viability of the airport and the growth of the airport. The reason the east side was selected as the preferred alternative was because when you look 20 years and beyond the west side will not accommodate the projected needs. Eventually a portion of the airport – terminal, general aviation development, U.S. Forest Service - will have to move to the east side.

- z. I heard from a county commissioner that they were going to sell portions of airport property and make a golf ball factory, etc.

There are no plans to sell airport property. The FAA needs to approve any sale or release of designated airport property per federal guidelines. Portions of the airport can be leased for non-aeronautical development but it also needs to be FAA approved.

Please see the supplemental answers document for additional information.

- aa. Would sewer need to be moved or expanded?

The treatment system would remain on the west side regardless of which alternative is selected. Per the analysis completed as part of the Master Plan, the system would require expansion in future years. However, the initial development would not require an expansion.

- bb. Where would the water come from for the new terminal? Dig new wells?

No, DRO has existing water rights that would meet the needs of the new terminal.

5. Next Steps

Colleen reviewed the project schedule, noting the EA is slated for approximately two years. The timeframe is subject to coordination with agencies, review, and agency and public comment. Four public open houses are scheduled with two being held on the same day at different times and locations to give the community a better opportunity to attend. From now until January 2016, portions of the document will be drafted (Introduction, Purpose and Need, and Alternative Analysis); tribal coordination conducted, and some baseline data will be done including existing noise and air quality analyses. The field work (wetland, endangered species, and culture resources) cannot happen until the weather becomes warmer (April/May 2016).

6. Additional Comments from Participants

- I think all the people in this room feel the preferred alternative was a foregone conclusion the minute you put those three options out there. It never seemed like the other two options were given serious consideration. The Master Plan writing is biased and is tries to persuade the public into doing one thing over the other. It seems like the other two were red herrings all along, it was always to build this big master plan on the other side and we feel like we're being steamrolled over and misinformed.

- The prior airport manager ran the airport for 20 years and he wasn't even invited to the Master Plan meetings because they don't like him, the commissioners don't like him or whatever. He had lots of ideas to make the airport serviceable for us, for our community, and those ideas were washed under the rug.
- Airlines come and go, we are such a small market we have no effect on the bottom line for United or Frontier or Southwest. Business men in this area think if we build it we're going to get new service and more flights but we know for a fact that's not going to happen, there's no guarantee.
- At the end of the day, none of us can really control this process. We don't feel that we have any real say. It's happening whether we like it or not.
- The money that's come in every time, - who gets the money? It sure isn't the county, the farm people or the people living here... It's the newcomers that come in take all their profits and run.