1.0 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to update the Durango-La Plata County Airport (DRO or Airport) Master Plan, Airport Layout Plan (ALP), and to determine the extent, type, and schedule of development needed to not only maintain current service levels but to grow the Airport in a healthy and feasible way. The Airport has experienced a significant increase in passenger enplanements since the last official Master Plan was completed in 2005. This study will serve to update both the Master Plan and the ALP.

1.1 STUDY GOALS

The overall goal is to develop a plan that prepares DRO to serve as the preferred gateway and economic catalyst for the Four Corners region. In order to accomplish this goal, the following main objectives have been identified:

- Determine the current condition of existing facilities and their efficiencies.
- Provide a planning document for the next 20 years that is technically accurate, realistically executable, and financially feasible and achieves financial and environmental sustainability.
- Prepare forecasts of aviation activity to include commercial passenger enplanements and aircraft operations.
- Prepare a financial plan that considers the operating budget, revenue, expenses, and potential FAA grant funding.
- Incorporate public involvement throughout the process to ensure that the future of the Airport aligns with the values and vision of the community.

1.2 LOCAL INFORMATION/HISTORY

La Plata County lies in the southwest corner of Colorado, in the Four Corners region. This region includes the southwestern corner of Colorado, the northwestern corner of New Mexico, the northeastern corner of Arizona, and the southeastern corner of Utah (see **Figure 1-1**). The county, named for the La Plata River and the La Plata Mountains, has a land area of approximately 1,700 square miles. “La Plata” is the Spanish word for silver, the basis for settlement in the area in the late 1800s, with the County founded in 1894.

FIGURE 1-1 – LOCATION MAP

Note: Not to scale
Source: Jviation

La Plata County's population was 43,941 in 2000, and grew to 51,334 by 2010, a 16.8-percent increase. The estimated population for 2012 was 52,419, representing a 2.1-percent increase over the two-year period.[1]

Durango is the county seat of La Plata County. The city, founded in 1880 by the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad to serve the San Juan mining district[2], was named after Durango, Mexico. It is perched at 6,512 feet above sea level, making it one of the most beautiful areas in the Four Corners region. The city is best known for the Historic Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad, being the home of Fort Lewis College, and for its proximity to Mesa Verde National Park. It is a popular year-round tourist destination as well as a growing business, government, and education center.[3]

Durango's 2010 population was 16,887, growing 15 percent from its 2000 population of 14,687. The estimated population for 2012 was 17,216, representing a 1.9-percent increase over the two-year period, similar to the county's growth rate for the same period.

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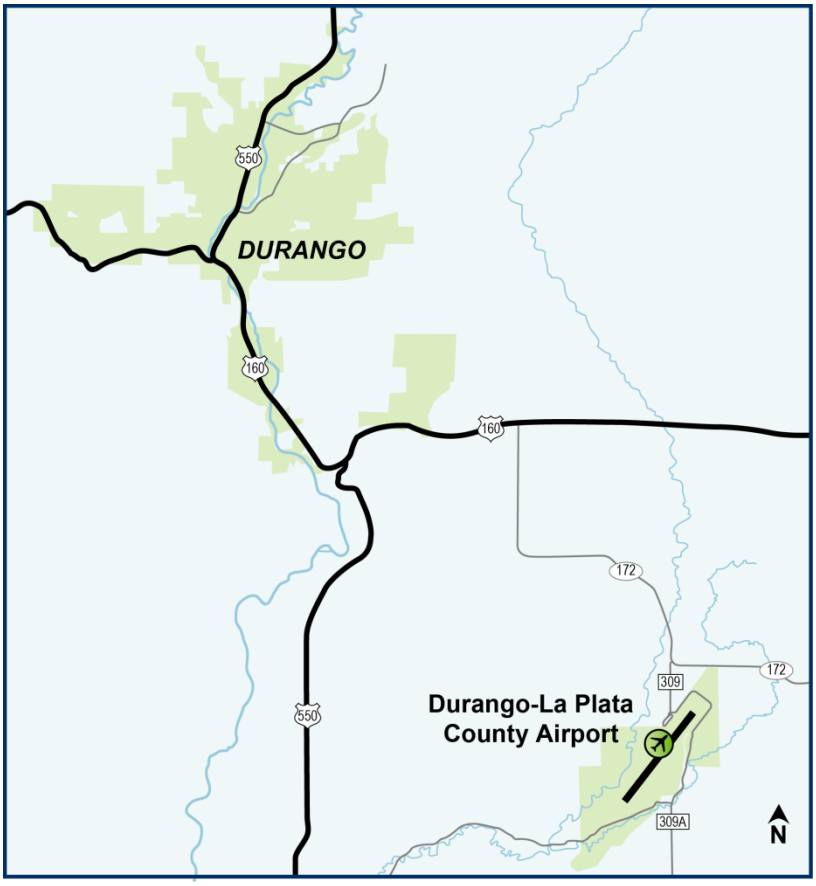
[1] U.S. Census QuickFacts, http://quickfacts.census.gov, accessed June 2014
[2] City of Durango Colorado, www.durangogov.org, accessed June 2014
[3] Ibid.

1.3 AIRPORT LOCATION

The Durango-La Plata County Airport is located approximately 14 miles southeast of the Central Business District (CBD) of Durango. The Airport sits at an elevation of 6,689 feet above mean sea level (MSL). State Highway 172 to 309 (Airport Road) provides access to DRO. **Figure 1-2** illustrates DRO's location relative to Durango.

FIGURE 1-2 – VICINITY MAP



Note: Not to scale
Source: Jviation

1.4 MANAGEMENT AND OWNERSHIP STRUCTURE

The Airport is co-owned by the City of Durango and La Plata County. Through an intergovernmental agreement (IGA), the Airport functions as a city department with direct oversight by the City of Durango. Pursuant to the IGA, the Airport Commission (Commission) serves in an advisory capacity with its members appointed by the city and county. The seven board members serve a three-year term and regularly meet the third Thursday of every month in the airport conference room. The purpose of the Commission is to advise the Director of Aviation on operations, budgets, and policy issues. The City and County jointly own and maintain the airport facilities, and function as the airport sponsor for Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) grant funding purposes. The Director of Aviation oversees the day-to-day operations and development of DRO. Airport staff is responsible for terminal operations, airfield operations, aircraft

rescue and fire fighting, and administration. However, the City and County have ultimate responsibility for all airport policy considerations, FAA grant assurances, as well as compliance with federal, state, and local regulations.

1.5 AIRPORT HISTORY AND ACTIVITY

Approximately 257 acres of land on the Southern Ute Reservation was purchased for the Durango-La Plata County Airport in 1947. Additional land was not purchased until 1959 with dollars from the Federal-Aid Airport Program (FAAP). The Airport continued to expand over time with both sponsor- and FAA-funded land purchases.

The passenger terminal was constructed in 1987 and opened in February 1988. However, DRO has benefitted from air service since 1978, from a number of carriers serving non-stop destinations. **Table 1-1** details the Airport's air service history (current as of July 2014).

Durango is a destination for many aircraft throughout the United States. The destinations for instrument flight rules (IFR) flight plans[4] filed from Durango over the course of one year are depicted in **Figure 1-3** (each route shown represents a destination, not the number of flight plans filed with FAA). This broad reach is a significant asset for the viability and economic health of the city and county as well as neighboring towns in the Four Corners region.

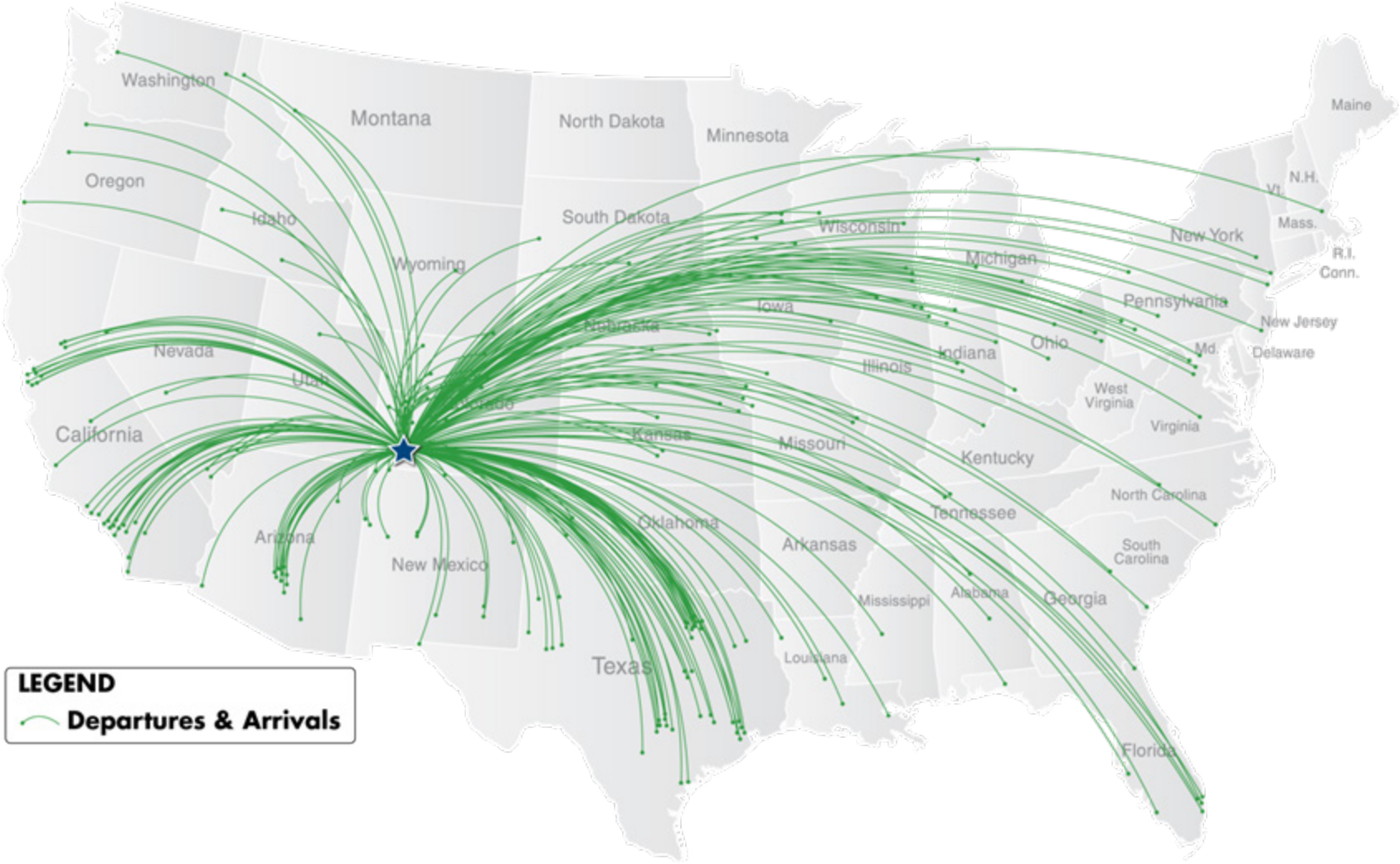
[4] During certain meteorological conditions, the FAA requires pilots to file a flight plan and follow instrument flight rules, which require pilots to comply with more restrictive weather requirements and certain air traffic control procedures. IFR flight plans are required for air carrier operations and typically filed by the business segment of general aviation (GA) that uses turboprop and business jet aircraft (rather than the pleasure fliers).

TABLE 1-1 – AIR SERVICE HISTORY

Between DRO and:	Carrier	Service Period	
		From	To
Albuquerque	Mesa Air Group	May 1997	May 2010
	Rio Grande Air	October 2002	December 2002
	Reno Air	December 1996	March 1997
	Aspen Airways	December 1989	March 1990
	America West Airlines	October 1984	October 1985
Colorado Springs	United Express	July 1989	August 2002
	Frontier Airlines	May 1979	September 1983
Dallas/Ft. Worth	American/American Eagle	December 1994	September 2002
	Frontier Airlines	December 1983	April 1985
	American/American Eagle	June 2011	Current
Denver	Frontier Airlines	April 2008	Current
	United Express	July 1995	Current
	Aspen Airways	January 1985	April 1990
	Frontier Airlines	January 1978	September 1984
Farmington	Mesa Air Group	July 1995	January 2005
	Aspen Airways	January 1985	February 1990
	Frontier Airlines	January 1978	September 1984
Grand Junction	Air 21	June 1996	October 1996
	America West Airlines	March 1985	July 1991
	Frontier Airlines	January 1978	September 1984
Houston	Continental / ExpressJet	December 2001	March 2003
Phoenix	US Airways Express / America West	June 1984	Current
Salt Lake City	Delta Connection/Sky West	July 2006	September 2008

Source: Durango-La Plata County Airport Terminal Area Master Plan, February 2012

FIGURE 1-3 – IFR FLIGHT PLANS (SEPTEMBER 2012 - SEPTEMBER 2013)



Note: Not to scale
Source: Jviation

1.6 ECONOMIC IMPACT

The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) Division of Aeronautics completed an Economic Impact Study (Study) in 2013 to determine how Colorado commercial and general aviation (GA) airports support the state and local economies. Estimated impacts were developed for jobs supported, annual payroll, and total annual economic output.

The jobs supported element is defined by those jobs that the operation and development of airports support through off-airport visitor spending and by off-airport companies that rely on air cargo services to ship their goods. Annual payroll is defined as that which is associated with aviation supported jobs. Total annual economic activity is comparable to the spending required to purchase goods and services to support operations for all activities considered. **Table 1-2** depicts the top ten airports, a mix of commercial and GA, with highest total economic output. As shown, DRO ranked ninth out of the 86 airports reviewed.

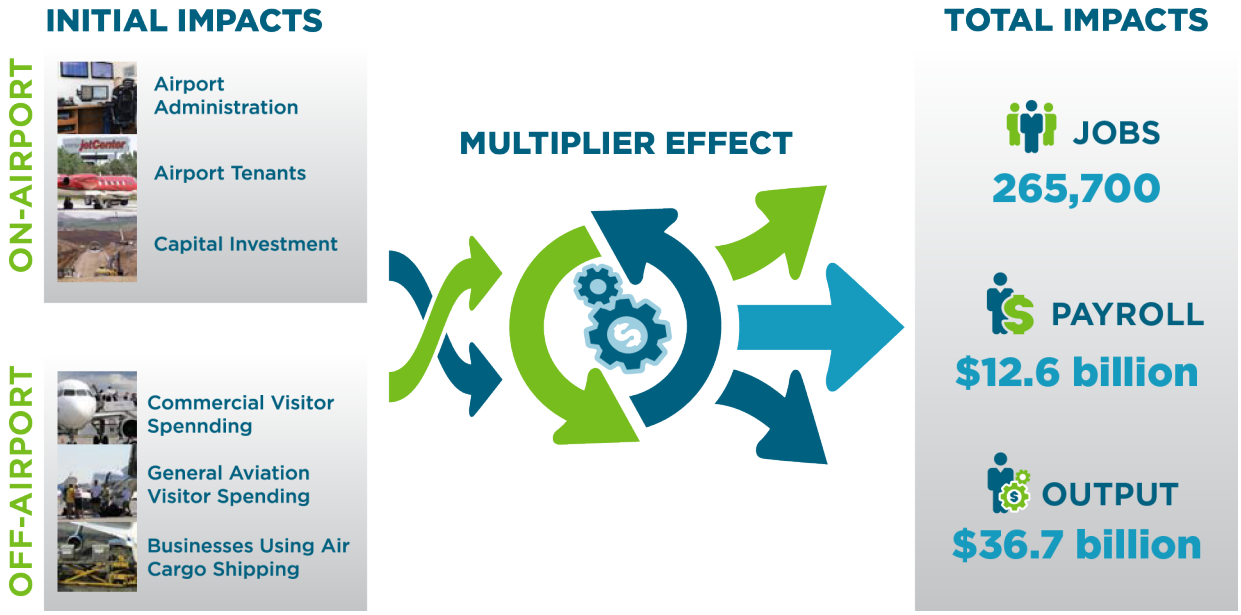
TABLE 1-2 – TOP TEN COLORADO AIRPORTS BY ECONOMIC OUTPUT

Airport	City	Service Category	Total Employment	Total Payroll	Total Output
DEN	Denver	Commercial	188,338	$8,624,024,963	$26,279,909,001
COS	Colorado Springs	Commercial	27,721	$1,753,550,417	$3,692,057,477
APA	Centennial	General Aviation	6,792	$404,921,753	$1,322,113,315
ASE	Aspen	Commercial	8,310	$283,004,101	$841,142,866
EGE	Eagle	Commercial	6,294	$217,511,273	$635,901,268
BJC	Broomfield	General Aviation	2,670	$153,902,452	$460,506,178
GJT	Grand Junction	Commercial	2,871	$130,775,972	$380,039,796
HDN	Hayden	Commercial	3,034	$104,934,790	$299,330,000
DRO	*Durango*	*Commercial*	*2,646*	*$94,483,704*	*$282,256,287*
GUC	Gunnison	Commercial	938	$34,743,998	$98,532,461

Source: CDOT, Division of Aeronautics, Economic Impact Study, 2013

Methodology for the study included all 86 airports providing assistance with data collection. Airport operators provided information for economic activities related to airport operations, tenants, capital investments, and visitor estimates. Initial economic impacts enter the economy and re-circulate, generating successive rounds of spending, employment, payroll, and output in other economy sectors. The impacts generated through recirculation are classified in this study as "multiplier" effects, illustrated in **Figure 1-4**. The Study used six regions to establish appropriate multipliers for each airport. State-level multipliers were used to calculate total statewide aviation-related economic impacts. As a higher percentage of all initial economic impacts are retained within the state's economy, statewide economic impacts are greater than the sum of the individiual airport impacts.

FIGURE 1-4 – MULTIPLIER EFFECTS



Sources: CDOT, Division of Aeronautics, Economic Impact Study, 2013 and Jviation, Inc.

Table 1-3 shows the initial impacts, impacts after a multiplier was applied, and total impacts of employment, payroll, and output for DRO.

TABLE 1-3 – STATE OF COLORADO: ON- AND OFF-AIRPORT IMPACTS ON TOTAL EMPLOYMENT, PAYROLL, AND WAGES

Impact Category	Employment			Payroll			Output		
	Initial	Multiplier	Total	Initial	Multiplier	Total	Initial	Multiplier	Total
Airport Administration, Tenants, & Capital Investment	218	192	410	$16,871,000	$7,723,000	$24,594,000	$49,428,000	$24,633,000	$74,060,000
Commercial Airline Visitor Spending	1,518	537	2,055	$44,447,000	$19,843,000	$64,290,000	$127,769,000	$63,890,000	$191,659,000
General Aviation Visitor Spending	134	47	181	$3,869,000	$1,731,000	$5,600,000	$10,968,000	$5,569,000	$16,537,000

Source: CDOT, Division of Aeronautics, Economic Impact Study, 2013