

CHAPTER 2: HOW DID WE ASSESS WASHINGTON'S AVIATION SYSTEM?

As a state system plan, LATS is designed to meet the planning objectives of transportation bill 5121 developed by the Washington State Legislature in 2005 and the Federal Aviation Administration's Advisory Circular 150/5070-7, *The Airport System Planning Process*. Ultimately, the purpose of LATS is to describe what we have, identify what we need, and develop a strategy for meeting Washington State's long term aviation needs. LATS is also taking into account the direction set by the legislature, and the input received from its numerous stakeholders including system users, airport sponsors, local governments, and regional planning agencies. The purpose of Phase I is to collect and analyze data and assess existing airport facilities for use during subsequent phases of LATS. Study findings are presented at a range of geographic levels and organized by state and federal classification systems to serve these various purposes.

Who is this Report Written for?

Washington State Legislature

The specific intent of the legislature is described in Washington State transportation bill ESSB 5121. The bill requires WSDOT Aviation to conduct an airport capacity/facility assessment in Phase I and a demand/market analysis in Phase II. In the final phase, the governor will appoint an Aviation Planning Council. The Governor's Airport Planning Council will review the data and make recommendations to the governor, Legislature, Transportation Commission, and Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPO) on how to best meet statewide commercial and general aviation capacity needs. The requirements of the bill are described below:

- Include a statewide analysis of existing airport facilities, and passenger and air cargo transportation capacity. The study must address both commercial and general aviation; however, the primary focus of the assessment must be on commercial aviation.
- Include a statewide needs analysis of airport facilities, passenger and air cargo transportation capacity, and forecast market demand needs over the next 25 years with a more detailed analysis of the Puget Sound, southwest Washington, Spokane, and Tri-Cities regions. The

analysis must address the forecasted needs of both commercial aviation and general aviation; however, the primary focus of the analysis must be on commercial aviation.

- Review and evaluate high-speed passenger transportation facilities and services including rail or magnetic levitation transportation systems, to connect airports as a means to more efficiently utilize airport capacity, as well as to connect major population and activity centers.

Federal Aviation Administration

The National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS) and the Advisory Circular 150/5070-7, *The Airport System Planning Process*, presents the FAA's guidance for conducting statewide aviation system planning. State system plan results are incorporated into the NPIAS, which is a national plan updated every two years and identifies each state's specific airport improvements that will contribute to the achievement of FAA's goals. NPIAS supports the FAA's strategic goals for safety, system efficiency, and environmental compatibility. Aviation system planning fits between the FAA's national planning effort, as documented in the NPIAS, and the more comprehensive master plans prepared for individual airports.

WSDOT and its Planning Partners

While the legislature and FAA are the primary audiences for the study, LATS is expected to inform, and is informed by, a variety of other stakeholders including system users, airport sponsors, local governments, regional transportation planning agencies and other state agencies. In order to provide maximum benefit for these other groups, LATS is also designed to fit into Washington State's planning framework. This process emphasizes cooperative planning that involves the public and agencies at the local, regional, state and federal levels. Examples of planning efforts conducted at these levels include:

- Airport Master Plans and Airport Layout Plans
- Local Comprehensive Plans
- Regional Transportation Plans
- The Washington Transportation Plan (WTP)
- The National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS)

General Public

WSDOT is committed to consistent interaction with the public in order to inform, educate and engage people on the study's purpose and progress. Citizens of Washington State are interested in LATS because the recommendations made as a result of this study could affect their future transportation system, state economy and quality of life. WSDOT knows that outreach to the general public will be extremely vital to the study's success. Specifically, in Phase III, ESSB 5121 states that the Governor's Airport Planning Council will use public input when making recommendations about the state aviation system. It remains important that the public stay involved in all phases of LATS in order to make well-informed recommendations to the Governor's Airport Planning Council in Phase III.

How is the Public Involved?

WSDOT and the Legislature believe it is critical to solicit feedback and share results of this important statewide airport study in a transparent and comprehensive way.

The public outreach efforts for LATS started early with a communication plan, which was drafted in February 2006 and submitted to the public for a 10-day comment period. The final version of the communication plan is provided in the Appendix. The plan serves as the overall guidance and strategy for engaging the public throughout the study. Key outreach goals include maintaining an updated and comprehensive LATS Web page, distributing press releases through the WSDOT Aviation email list, leveraging existing aviation associations, hosting regional meetings, publishing quarterly newsletters and soliciting feedback through stakeholder interviews and an online survey.

WSDOT's dedicated LATS Web page offers the public a central location for pertinent information relating to the study. The Web page continues to evolve as news, reports and information about LATS become available. From the Web page, the public can sign up to receive WSDOT email alerts about LATS. WSDOT's email list currently has over 6,000 subscribers and is comprised of aviation interests including general aviation and commercial pilots, airport sponsors, local jurisdictions, aviation planners, legislators, etc.

In order to reach as many aviation user and interested parties as possible during Phase I, WSDOT reached out to many aviation associations, planning associations, the Transportation Commission, and other key

stakeholder groups. These groups have their own publications, distribution lists, conferences and meetings that WSDOT accessed to educate people about LATS. WSDOT will continue to work with these stakeholders to help disseminate the findings, efforts and progress throughout this study.

LATS outreach also includes a number of regional meetings to provide local stakeholders and members of the public with opportunities to obtain information about LATS. The first set of four regional meetings occurred in June 2006 in Seattle, Spokane, Moses Lake, and Chehalis. These meetings primarily targeted airport managers, although the public was also invited to attend. The second set of four regional meetings will provide an overview of findings for the Phase I results and is scheduled for early November 2006. Regional meetings provide a forum for interfacing with a number of stakeholders and convey the statewide significance of LATS.

The LATS team also launched a quarterly newsletter in June 2006 to introduce the study, announce the regional meetings, and provide additional opportunities for feedback. Available on the LATS Web site and in print, the newsletter highlights LATS' efforts including technical tasks and outreach activities. In addition to being distributed electronically to the WSDOT email list of over 6,000 registered stakeholders, legislative staff, airport managers and transportation associations received copies of the newsletter.

In July and August 2006 the project team conducted: approximately 35 stakeholder interviews and an online survey of 6,000 registered email subscribers of WSDOT's aviation news service. Stakeholder interviews included airport managers, state legislators, cargo and passenger commercial airlines, general aviation (GA) representatives, and other key constituents involved in economic development, aviation advocacy and cities located in areas with general aviation and/or commercial airports. The LATS Stakeholder Interview summary is available on the Web page and hard copies are available upon request.

In August 2006, over 500 stakeholders responded to a more general online survey distributed through WSDOT Aviations 6000 person data base. It gauged stakeholders' level of awareness about LATS, as well as how effective the outreach efforts have been to date. The summary of responses is available on the LATS Web page and upon request by WSDOT.

Both the stakeholder interviews and surveys show that a level of awareness has been created within the first few months of LATS. It was revealed that most people prefer to receive LATS information through email or via the Web site. It is the goal of LATS outreach efforts to

monitor public awareness and continue to strengthen the public's understanding of LATS.

On September 30, 2006, Phase I findings will be posted on the LATS Web site for public and agency review. Throughout LATS, information will be continually posted to the Web site and distributed upon request so as to keep the public informed of findings and results.

What was the Data Collection Methodology?

Inventory Process/Database Update

As part of previous aviation planning projects, WSDOT Aviation conducted data collection efforts in 1997 at 129 airports, and then updated the information in 2003. The data collected in 2003 did not include commercial service airports. An additional 11 airports were identified and added to the database in 2005, since information was available through the FAA's Airport Master Record Data (5010) forms. The data collection included the following techniques:

- airport data search
- airport site visits
- airport management interviews
- physical facility inventories
- evaluation of existing operational activity
- WSDOT/FAA design standard compliance
- runway safety area inspections
- estimates of future operational activities
- multi-modal connection information
- identification of approach surface obstructions
- preparation of development needs lists
- pavement condition surveys
- preparation of an airport data condition assessment compendium

The resulting database provides information about facilities, services, and operations at 140 public-use airports. As part of the technical work effort outlined in the scope of work for LATS, Phase I, an online airport inventory survey was conducted to update the existing database. New material was also collected for the analysis of system capacity and future growth potential.

An online, web-based survey was developed to collect new and updated airport inventory information. Paper copies were distributed to individuals without the ability to access the web application. Airport sponsors received correspondence requesting their participation in the survey, and follow-up emails and phone calls were made through the summer. Upon completion of the surveys by each airport sponsor, the consultant team reviewed the surveys and provided follow-up phone calls to individual sponsors to clarify responses and verify the accuracy of submitted information.

Review of Existing Reports and Studies

Data gathered from the airport surveys were supplemented with information from airport master plans, airport layout plans, other planning documentation, aviation Web sites, and FAA reports and Master Record Data (5010) forms to provide the most updated information possible to complete the analysis. Another round of phone calls to airport sponsors was conducted to verify any discrepancies between the surveys and the supplemental documents.

How Does LATS Evaluate the Performance of the Aviation System?

Geographic Areas

The airports in Washington State are each part of a public transportation system that not only serves their immediate communities but are also contribute to the aviation network for both their regions and the state as a whole. Consequently, Phase I findings are presented from four perspectives: statewide, Special Emphasis Regions, Regional Transportation Planning Organizations, and individual airports. These geographic areas are described in more detail in Chapter 3.

Airport Classification Systems

Just as interstate highways serve a different purpose than arterials and local streets, different airports are designed to serve different air transportation needs. Airport classification systems are used to identify the role of each airport in the state system, and to understand the types of facilities and services necessary at each. The FAA has a classification system for the 66 Washington airports included in the national system, and the state has developed a similar classification system to address all 140 airports.

How Will Revisions to the Phase I Report Be Evaluated?

The purpose of Phase I was to collect data about the state's aviation system and describe existing facilities, services, activities and capacity. The Phase I report also presents a draft state classification system and associated minimum criteria and performance objectives. The data and findings presented in this report will set the framework for research conducted in Phase II. It is not the intent of LATS to draw conclusions about system needs – that task is the purview of the Governor's Airport Planning Council in Phase III.

The release of the Phase I report on September 30, 2006 is the first opportunity for public review. While the data and findings presented in the report have been thoroughly researched and reviewed, WSDOT anticipates that minor revisions may be appropriate to improve the accuracy of certain items. The state classifications, minimum criteria and performance objectives will be evaluated and revised based on public comment and further analysis. A full set of technical documents covering the research items from Phases I and II will be released as a final technical report in July 2007.

Public comment is welcome and encouraged at any time during the three-year, three-phase LATS study. Comments on the initial Phase I report will be recorded and available as part of the final technical report. Individual comments will be addressed as follows:

1. **Factual errors:** Public comments that identify factual errors in the report will be recorded and investigated before data and findings are updated in the report.
2. **Conclusions:** Public comments that draw conclusions from the data, suggest outcomes, or voice support or opposition to policy options will be reserved for consideration by the Governor's Airport Planning Council in Phase III.

3. **State classifications, minimum criteria and performance objectives:** Comments related to the interpretation of criteria used to place airports in each classification and set performance objectives for each classification will be recorded, investigated, and considered as part of the evaluation in Phase II. Comments related to the impact of the classification system and performance objectives on individual airports will be reserved for consideration by the Governor's Airport Planning Council in Phase III.