

CHAPTER 5: WHAT DID WE LEARN ABOUT FUTURE ACTIVITY?

Introduction

In Phase II of the Long-Term Air Transportation Study (LATS), forecasts of future aviation activity at public use airports across Washington State were developed. Forecasts of aviation activity are divided into the following segments: commercial passenger traffic forecasts, general aviation activity forecasts, and air cargo activity forecasts. A base year of 2005 was used in the forecasts, with the various activity measures forecast in five to ten year increments through the Year 2030.

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 in this report provide summaries of the commercial activity, general aviation activity, and air cargo activity forecast results respectively. More detailed technical memorandum have also been prepared as part of the Phase II initiative to describe the forecast process for each segment at length; those reports are provided in the appendices.

Why Were the Forecasts Prepared?

Forecasting future aviation demand is critical to long range facility planning for the state. Expectations regarding future activity within regional planning districts and at individual airports will be weighed against available airport capacity to determine potential capacity shortfalls and, where these shortfalls exist, to determine alternative strategies for meeting regional and statewide demand. By identifying potential capacity constraints well in advance, the state and FAA will be positioned to identify, fund and implement needed airport facility enhancements so that the air transportation needs of residents and visitors to Washington State can continue to be effectively met.

It is important to recognize that the forecasts prepared and utilized in connection with the Long-Term Air Transportation Study were developed with a statewide, macro-level focus in order to assist the state in assessing its long-term airport facility needs and associated funding requirements, and in developing a strategic plan to assure the efficient operation of the Washington State aviation system.

The LATS planning forecasts will not eliminate or replace the need for individual airport planning and forecasting efforts, such as those typically presented in airport master plans, airport layout plans, and other planning

documents. These planning efforts conducted on the part of individual airports will continue to have central importance in Washington State's funding decisions related to specific airport improvement projects.

How Were the Forecasts Developed?

Within each forecast segment, independent forecasts were developed based on forecast methodologies reviewed by both WSDOT Aviation and the FAA Regional District Office. Forecast methodologies were, in all cases, approved as appropriate for this kind of high-level statewide study. Forecasts generally take into account historical aviation activity trends in Washington State and in the nation, as well as historical and projected economic growth in individual Washington counties and planning regions.

At thirty-two Washington airports, existing FAA-accepted¹⁷ master plan forecasts developed in connection with individual airport planning efforts had a base year of 2001 or later. These forecasts were extended through the Year 2030 for consistency with the LATS planning horizon and adopted for use in this study.

For more detailed accounts of forecast methodology, refer to the various technical memorandum.

Review Process

Draft forecasts prepared by the Study Team were first forwarded to WSDOT Aviation and the FAA Regional District Office for internal review. During the review process, adjustments to allow for more accurate reflections of airport and regional conditions were made to individual airport forecasts as appropriate. Forecasts were then distributed to individual airport sponsors across the state. Telephone interviews were scheduled and carried out with the individual airport sponsors to obtain their feedback and comment, prior to finalizing the forecasts.

¹⁷ It should be noted that in certain instances, FAA acceptance of individual airport forecasts did not entail approval of all forecast parameters, particularly when specific forecasted values (e.g., aircraft operations) fall outside normal FAA planning parameters. FAA acceptance of individual forecasts may have been granted in circumstances when these forecasted values had no associated facility improvement implications.