

CHAPTER 2 CONTEXT

2.1 PURPOSE

This Chapter provides some background information about the general aviation, regulatory, and community environment in which Renton Municipal Airport operates in order to set the Airport Business Plan in context.

2.2 CONCLUSIONS

- General aviation is an important component of the transportation system, It takes pressure away from other transportation modes and provides business and recreational access to many communities. General aviation, and in particular airports that are part of the National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS), serve a unique function in the air transportation system by relieving commercial service airports of general aviation traffic.
- Both state and federal law constrain the City in managing the airport. The City is obligated by both the deed it signed when it took the airport over and federal grant assurances to maintain and operate the airport in a non-discriminatory fashion to serve all its aeronautical users and allow for its safe use. State law directs the City to protect the airport as an essential public facility.
- Renton Municipal Airport is governed by the City Council and managed under the direction of the City's Director of Transportation. This is one of the most common governance structures for airports in the U.S.
- Within the community, issues surrounding the airport and its operation focus on its noise impact on surrounding neighborhoods, the limits on noise mitigation due to the airspace constraints above the airport, and compatible land use and zoning in areas surrounding the airport.

2.3 FINDINGS

2.3.1 The Aviation Context: The Role of General Aviation

The following provides an overview of general aviation today. It also outlines the role of general aviation reliever airports such as Renton in the regional air transportation system.

2.3.1.1 What is General Aviation?

General Aviation (GA) is defined as all civilian flight except scheduled passenger airline service. Like commercial aviation, it includes flights to get between two locations. However, a great deal of GA flight activity is to accomplish a purpose from the air, including aerial photography or crop dusting. It also includes flight instruction and business and personal travel. Figure 2-1 provides a “taxonomy” of general aviation activities. Appendix D provides a glossary of terms related to aviation and airport management.

General aviation includes flying as diverse as overnight package delivery, emergency medical evacuation, inspection trips to remote construction sites, aerial crop-dusting and airborne law enforcement.

An estimated 65% of general aviation flights are conducted for business and private transportation purposes that require transportation more flexible than the airlines can offer. That flexibility can be a hometown businessperson flying his own small airplane to see four clients on a one-day, 700-mile circuit, or it can be a CEO and five staff members working privately at 30,000 feet while en route to a meeting. By scheduled airline, the first could take four days and three hotel bills; the second would be impossible.

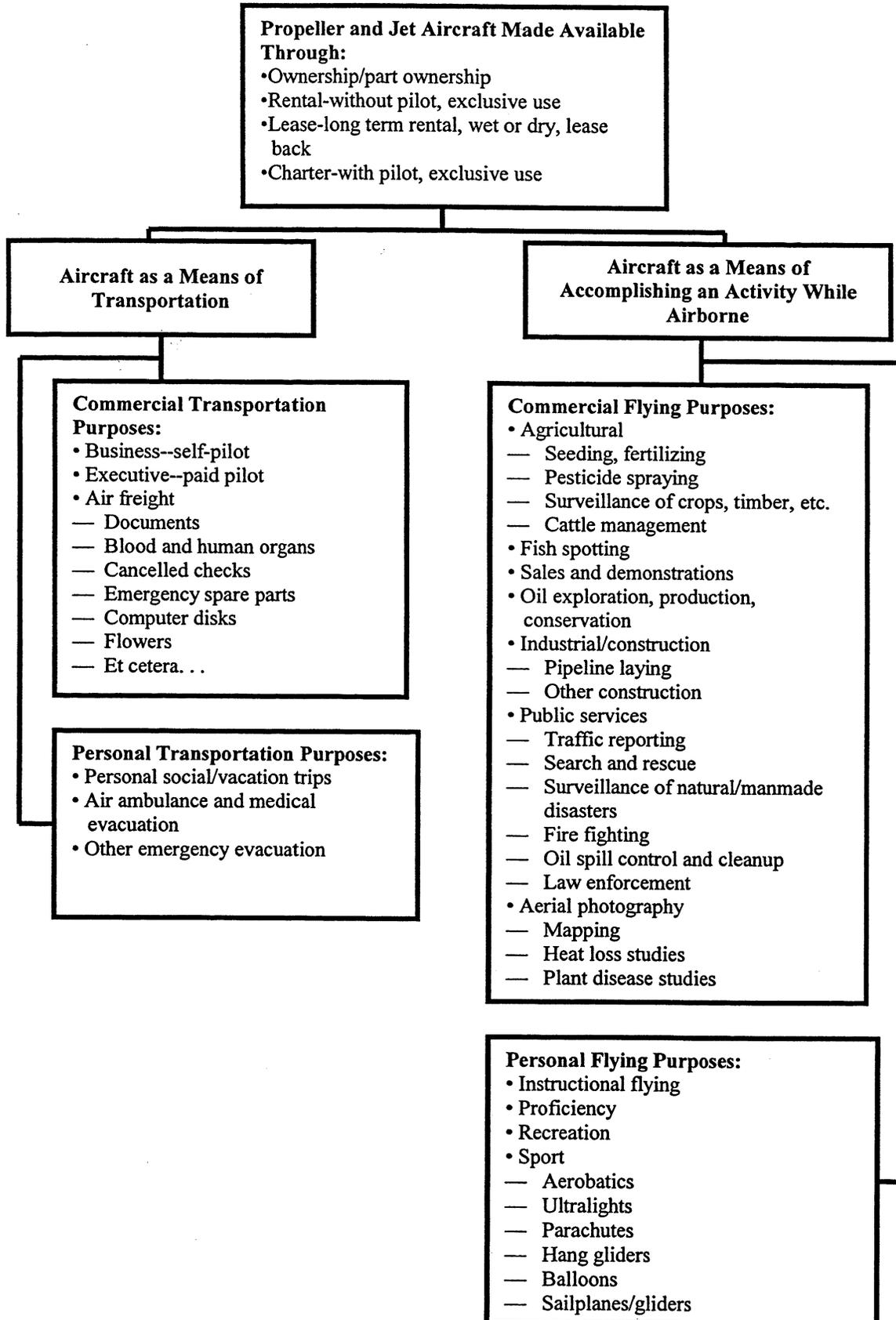
A common misperception is that personal or small business aircraft are only used by, or available to, the extremely wealthy. In fact, many people of middle-class means fly airplanes less costly than a new family car. Moreover, learning to fly a small general aviation airplane is well within the capabilities of the average person both intellectually and physically.

The general aviation fleet is very large in terms of numbers (less so in terms of passenger seats). More than 92% of the approximately 225,000 civil aircraft registered in the United States are general aviation aircraft, meaning that only 8% of the civil aircraft fleet is in scheduled airline service. In addition, of the nation’s 635,000 pilots, over 500,000 fly general aviation airplanes.

General aviation is an important component of the nation’s economy, as well as the nation’s transportation system, for the following reasons. It:

- Takes pressure off other transportation modes for a significant portion of business and corporate travel;
- Provides business and recreational access and, sometimes, food and medical supplies, to small communities and remote resorts that otherwise could not survive;
- Provides emergency travel services and facilities: medical evacuation, flood and earthquake relief, military; and

Figure 2-1: A Taxonomy of General Aviation



Source: *Essentials of Aviation Management: A Guide for Fixed Base Operators*, Richardson, Rodwell, and Baty, 1995.

- Provides many key functions from the air that cannot effectively be performed from the ground e.g.: fish spotting, fire fighting, fire patrol, pipeline/powerline inspection, remote logging, and remote construction.

2.3.1.2 What is a “Reliever Airport” and Why is it Important?

According to the national Aviation Capacity Enhancement Plan (FAA, 2000), there are more than 19,000 airports and landing strips in the United States, over 5,000 of which are open to the public. The FAA considers 3,367 of these public-use airports to be significant to the capacity of the National Airspace System (NAS). They are included in the National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS) and are eligible to receive Federal grants under the Airport Improvement Program (AIP). Within the NPIAS, the airports are divided into two major categories: commercial service airports and general aviation airports. Renton is a general aviation NPIAS airport, that is, an airport of national significance.

Commercial service (CS) airports are public airports receiving scheduled passenger service and having 2,500 or more enplaned passengers per year. An enplaned passenger is a passenger on a scheduled or unscheduled commercial flight. Of the 546 commercial service airports in the U.S., the 422 airports that have more than 10,000 annual enplanements are classified as primary airports. Those commercial service airports enplaning from 2,500 to 10,000 passengers annually are classified as “other” commercial service airports.

General aviation airports are those that have less than 2,500 annual enplanements or do not receive any scheduled commercial service. They are included in the NPIAS if they account for enough activity (generally defined as having at least ten based aircraft) and are at least 20 miles from the nearest NPIAS airport.

The 2,821 NPIAS general aviation airports are divided into *reliever* and *general aviation* airports. Relievers are high capacity general aviation airports in major metropolitan areas that provide general aviation pilots and aircraft with alternatives to using congested commercial service airports.

As mentioned, Renton Municipal Airport is an airport of national importance listed in NPIAS. Within the region, Renton serves as a “reliever” airport, that is, it relieves Seattle-Tacoma International Airport of GA traffic. Reliever airports such as Renton fulfill an important role for the nation’s air transportation system as a whole. They help maintain the capacity of commercial airports such as Sea-Tac. Because of the differences in speed between large and small aircraft, and the potential impact of large jet wake turbulence on smaller aircraft, it is not safe for them to be mixed closely, requiring both physical and temporal separation. Separation adequate to achieve safety would vastly reduce Sea-Tac’s capacity if it had to handle more of the region’s GA flights, including Renton’s.

air taxi operators. In 1999, 1,780 general aviation airports had some enplanements, but totaled only 0.1 percent of total passenger enplanements. Renton, primarily due to its seaplane base, serves about 8,000 air taxi and charter service passengers annually.

2.3.2 How Renton Municipal Airport is Governed

Public airports nationwide are owned and governed in a variety of manners. Some are part of a port district (e.g. Seattle-Tacoma International Airport is run by the Port of Seattle); some are part of a county (e.g. King County International Airport / Boeing Field; Pierce County Airport/ Thun Field in Puyallup). Many, like Renton, are run by cities, sometimes as a separate City department and sometimes, as with Renton, as part of a larger department. Renton's airport is managed as part of the Transportation Planning division of the City's Planning, Building and Public Works Department.

Code Cities in Washington State have two forms of government. One form has a part-time City Council who take turns—usually through elections among themselves—to name a Mayor and Deputy Mayor. In this form of organization, the City Manager, generally a full-time employee, is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), and the Mayor and Council act as the legislative branch and set policy.

The second form of government has a separately elected Mayor who is the CEO, (executive branch) and a separate part or full time City Council (legislative branch). This is Renton's structure.

In Renton, administration of the airport is under the Director of Transportation, reporting through the Director of Planning, Building and Public Works. Legislative policy direction is the responsibility of the three-member Transportation and Airport Committee of the Council. The executive/ administration makes proposals to this Committee, which may then table them, modify and then recommend approval of them, send them back for additional staff analysis, or recommend their approval with or without modifications. Items are forwarded to the full seven-member City Council for approval.

The City Council may usually adopt them, table them, send them back for further work or adopt an opposing strategy.

According to the City Attorney, Council adoption actions may be through Ordinances or Resolutions (used for laws and budget/financial actions) or Motions (indicating policy intent but not having the same binding nature as ordinances or resolutions). Staff actions may be day-to-day or may be codified in Administrative Procedures, which are developed at the direction of the Mayor or Department heads and approved by the Mayor. Such Procedures lay out the formal and major aspects of the how the City is run.

The recommendations of this Business Plan (provided in Chapter 9) indicate what method of adoption is recommended to implement each.

As noted above, Renton Municipal Airport is owned and managed today within a city-ownership structure. Thus, the airport is treated as a part of a city department, in this

case the Planning/Building and Public Works Department (Public Works). Within the U.S., city ownership/management is one of the two most common governance structures. Within the overall category of city ownership, there can be a range of operational arrangements, with airports sometimes being treated as part of Public Works, Roads and Aviation (as in Santa Clara County, CA), Construction and Facilities Management (as in Boeing Field/King County), or even Parks and Recreation. The initial placement of airports within a given city department seems to be a matter of historical accident. In addition, placement sometimes changes in order to give airport management a higher reporting position as the airport takes on greater economic importance to the city where it is located.

2.3.3 The Regulatory Context: Renton's Obligations Toward the Airport

The Business Plan for Renton Airport, to be viable, must be implemented in a manner compliant with all applicable federal and state regulations. This section identifies the obligations the City of Renton has with regard to the operation of the airport and its protection. The most important responsibilities are:

- Operating and maintaining the airport and all its facilities to serve all aeronautical users of the airport and allow for its safe use. This includes preventing any construction activities that can be considered hazards to aviation both on the airport and within the runway protection zones;
- Preventing incompatible land uses in the areas surrounding the airport, both with regard to safety and noise issues;
- Operating the airport in a non-discriminatory way, allowing any qualified enterprise or individual to use the airport for aviation purposes on reasonable terms and conditions; and
- Ensuring that all airport property, including surplus property, is used or available for use to the public under fair, equal, and non-discriminatory conditions.

2.3.3.1 Federal Requirements

2.3.3.1.1 Airport Deed Restrictions and Obligations

The City of Renton took over what is now Renton Municipal Airport from the federal government on September 25, 1947 after its designation as surplus property by the War Assets Administrator. By accepting the deed, Renton accepted restrictions and obligations that ensure that the airport will function as an airport. These restrictions remain in place for Renton and any potential future airport owner(s) until the federal government may decide that Renton Airport is not needed as an airport and can be put to other uses.

The deed includes the following restrictions:

- That all of the property transferred hereby, (...) shall be used for public airport purposes, and only for such purposes, on reasonable terms and without unjust discrimination and without grant or exercise of any exclusive right for use of the airport within the meaning of the Civil Aeronautics Act of 1938. As used herein, “Public airport purposes” shall be deemed to exclude use of the structures conveyed hereby, or any portion thereof, for manufacturing or industrial purposes. However, until, in the opinion of Civil Aeronautics Administration or its successor Government agency, it is deemed needed for public airport purposes, any particular structure transferred hereby may be utilized for non-manufacturing or industrial purposes in such manner as {the City} deems advisable, provided such use does not interfere with operation of the remainder of the airport as a public airport.
- That the entire landing area of the airport and all structures, improvements, facilities and equipment of the airport shall be maintained at all time in good and serviceable condition to assure its efficient operation, provided, however, that such maintenance shall be required as to structures, improvements, facilities and equipment only during the remainder of their estimated life, as determined by the Civil Aeronautics Administration or its successor Government agency.

In addition to these restrictions, the deed also contained a set of obligations that run with the land:

- That insofar as it is within its power and reasonably possible, {the City} shall prevent any use of land either within or outside the boundaries of the airport, including the construction, erection, alteration, or growth of any structure or other object thereon, which use would be a hazard to the landing, take-off, or maneuvering or aircraft at the airport, or otherwise limit its usefulness as an airport.
- That the building areas and non-aviation facilities of or on the airport shall be used, altered, modified, or improved only in a manner which does not interfere with the efficient operation of the landing area and of the airport facilities.
- That itinerant aircraft owned by the United States of America ... shall at all times have the right to use the airport in common with others...
- That during the existence of any emergency declared by the President of the United States of America or the Congress thereof, the Government shall have the right without charge, ... to the full, unrestricted possession, control and use of the landing area, building areas, and airport facilities, or any part thereof, including any additions or improvements thereto made subsequent to the declaration of any part of the airport as surplus. ... (T)he Government shall be responsible during such a period of use for the entire cost of maintaining all such areas...
- That no exclusive right for the use of any landing area or air navigation facilities, included in or on the airport shall be granted or exercised.

- That the property transferred hereby may be successively transferred only with the approval of the Civil Aeronautics Administration or the successor Government agency and with the proviso that any such subsequent transferee assumes all the obligations imposed upon {the city} ...

The deed also contains a provision that gives the federal government the right to take the airport back if the city is in breach of the restrictions and obligations listed above. Presumably, the agency would then find another entity to run the airport. In that case, the federal government would be required to pay fair market value for any structures or improvements made to the airport that were not funded by FAA. The full deed text is shown in Appendix E.

2.3.3.1.2 Airport Grant Assurances

Section 49 USC 47107(a) of the Federal Reauthorization Act of 1996 requires airport sponsors to provide a series of assurances as condition for receiving a federal grant under the Airport Improvement Program (AIP). Once an airport has accepted an AIP grant, the assurances become a binding contractual obligation between the airport sponsor and the federal government. The assurances are designed to ensure that the federal government's investment in the airport is protected and that the airport can function safely and effectively over the life-time of the improvements supported by the federal grant that was received. Since Renton has accepted grants under AIP, it is required to comply with these assurances. Renton must:

- Take appropriate action, including the adoption of zoning laws, to the extent reasonable, to restrict the use of land adjacent to or in the immediate vicinity of the airport to activities and purposes compatible with normal airport operations, including landing and takeoff of aircraft;
- Comply with all relevant federal laws and regulations;
- Not take any action that would negatively impact the airport's ability to fulfill the terms of the contract it entered with FAA without prior approval of FAA;
- Be reasonably consistent with local plans;
- Consider local interest;
- Consult with users and hold public hearings before making major decisions about the airport's runways and taxiways and its operations;
- Comply with applicable clean air and water standards;
- Operate and maintain the airport and all its facilities as necessary to serve the aeronautical users of the airport and allow for safe use;

- Take appropriate action to prevent, remove, and mitigate any hazards to aviation in the approach paths and runway terminal areas of the airport;
- Be non-discriminatory and allow any qualified enterprise or individual to use the airport for aviation activities;
- Ensure that all airport property, including surplus property, is used or available for use to the public under fair, equal, and nondiscriminatory conditions according to the conditions of the contract with FAA; and
- Use any revenues generated by the airport or local taxes on aviation fuel for airport purposes only and keep adequate records to that effect.

FAA is responsible for ensuring that airport sponsors who have given these assurances are in fact complying with them. The agency uses the Airport Compliance Program to enforce the contractual obligations of airports that received AIP funds. Regional FAA Airport Offices are responsible for maintaining an individual record for each airport under their jurisdiction that accurately reflects the extent to which the airport owner is complying with its obligations and lists the actions carried out by the FAA to monitor compliance.

2.3.3.1.3 Noise and Access Restrictions

In addition to grant assurances and deed agreements discussed above, airport sponsors desiring to impose noise or access restrictions must meet several other requirements of Federal law. For example, Congress enacted in 1990 the Airport Noise and Capacity Act (ANCA), requiring that the Secretary of Transportation establish a national aviation noise policy. In response to the Congressional mandate, FAA developed rules for reviewing—and in some cases, approving—airport noise and access restrictions on operations of Stage 2 and Stage 3 aircraft.¹ These rules are found in the Code of Federal Regulations, Title 14, Part 161.

Part 161 “grandfathers” pre-existing restrictions (in effect before ANCA became law), and allows for new voluntary airport access restrictions. However, the regulations require that all noise and access restrictions unilaterally imposed by the airport operator be properly justified, and be subject to a public notice period. In addition, FAA must approve restrictions on Stage 3 operations based on specific statutory criteria. Any proposed restriction affecting Stage 3 aircraft:

- Must be reasonable, non-arbitrary, and nondiscriminatory;
- May not create an undue burden on interstate or foreign commerce;

¹ FAA rates all jet aircraft (and heavy propeller-driven aircraft) based on the noise they produce from Stage 1 (noisiest) to Stage 3 (quietest) based on a formula that takes into account different noise readings during take-off and landing. Effective December 31, 2000, most operations of Stage 1 and Stage 2 aircraft weighing more than 75,000 lbs. are prohibited by law in the 48 contiguous states (certain flights for maintenance and aircraft modification continue to be allowed).

- May not be inconsistent with maintaining safe and efficient use of the navigable airspace;
- May not conflict with other U.S. laws or regulations; and
- May not create an undue burden on the national aviation system.

Lastly, there are U.S. Constitutional considerations limiting the ability of airport sponsors to restrict access to airports. Many of these requirements are also addressed by Federal statutes. Thus, in general, an airport sponsor may adopt rules establishing permissible levels of noise at its airport provided those rules are reasonable, nondiscriminatory, and do not impose an undue burden on interstate or foreign commerce.

With one notable exception,² FAA has rejected all attempts by airport operators to restrict aircraft noise by imposing airport access or operational restrictions. Several recent and ongoing FAA investigations and court cases highlight the issues raised:

- Westchester, NY: FAA is informally investigating claims that the airport sponsor is attempting to enforce an otherwise voluntary night curfew on aircraft operations. It has been in effect since 1983 (the airport began its voluntary program after a Federal court struck down a similar mandatory restriction). In one instance FAA reported complaints from airport tenants that the sponsor was requiring, as a condition for renewing ground leases, an agreement to abide by the nighttime restriction or face contractual penalties. FAA argues that by imposing such a provision in its ground leases, the airport sponsor is making the curfew mandatory, and thus, it may be circumventing unlawfully the requirements of Part 161. The airport's position is that inclusion of such a provision in a lease document does not necessarily establish that the airport has coerced its tenants into accepting the terms.

On a separate but related investigation, the Air Transport Association – a trade group representing the major U.S. airlines – recently complained to FAA that the airport sponsor was attempting to enforce the nighttime curfew on the airlines by restricting access to the airport's vehicular parking garage between 12:30 a.m. and 5:50 a.m. The results of these investigations are pending.

- Islip, NY: Since 1984, MacArthur Airport in Islip has had a nighttime curfew restricting operations of aircraft exceeding specific noise measurements. Originally, the restriction had the effect of banning all jet operations at night. However, with the advent of new technology, some quieter jets are now able to operate without violating the curfew. Islip has attempted to restrict these new operations by, among other things, attempting to amend its agreements with the airport's Fixed Base Operators so that jet aircraft would not be serviced during the curfew hours. Most recently, Islip has announced that it is considering imposing a \$50,000 surcharge on late night flights to the airport. FAA has taken the position that, although the original curfew is

² In 1998 FAA approved a ban of all Stage 1 aircraft at the Naples Municipal Airport, Florida.

grandfathered under ANCA, Islip may not now impose further restrictions without violating Federal law.

- Oceanside, CA: Recently, the City of Oceanside imposed a nighttime ban on all flights, and severely restricted touch-and-go operations, at its general aviation airport. After being advised by FAA that the proposed restrictions would violate the sponsor's grant assurances, Oceanside has not enforced the ban. In its letter, FAA also noted that Oceanside had allowed significant non-compatible land uses around the airport and had not used its zoning powers to prevent such development.
- Naples, FL: In an effort to mitigate aircraft noise between the 60 and 65 Ldn noise contours, the Naples Municipal Airport recently imposed a complete ban on Stage 2 aircraft operations, including general aviation aircraft. FAA immediately criticized the access restriction and issued a preliminary, informal determination letter stating that the ban was an unreasonable restriction on the use of the airport and that it violated that airport sponsor's grant assurances and other Federal law. Initially, Naples agreed to defer enforcement of the ban pending resolution of the issue with FAA.

Meanwhile, the National Business Aviation Association and the General Aviation Manufacturers Association – two trade groups representing the business and manufacturing aviation communities respectively – brought a Federal court action to enjoin the ban. The court, siding with Naples, ruled that the airport had complied with Federal regulation in imposing the ban, and that the restriction was permissible under Federal law. Because FAA was not a party to the lawsuit, it remains unclear whether FAA may now separately find Naples in noncompliance with its grant assurances.

- San Jose, CA: Since 1984, in an attempt to reduce the level of aircraft noise, San Jose International Airport has had in place a nighttime curfew restricting the operations of aircraft with a maximum weight of more than 75,000 lbs. The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association recently challenged a San Jose passenger facility charge application pending before FAA by claiming that the nighttime restriction violates the airport's reasonable access assurances. Concurrently, a single aircraft owner sued the airport in Federal court seeking an exemption from the curfew. Mr. Ellison, who owns and operates a relatively quiet Stage 3 corporate jet weighing more than 75,000 lbs., argued that the aircraft ban is unjustly discriminatory because it is based on weight, rather than level of noise generated by the aircraft. The Federal judge presiding over the case agreed with Mr. Ellison and ordered San Jose to grant him an exemption.
- Flying Cloud, MN: Flying Cloud is a reliever airport for the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport. In 1978, working with the communities surrounding it, the airport sponsor enacted an ordinance banning the operation of jet aircraft, with the exception of certain aircraft weighing less than 20,000 lbs. More recently, the airport has proposed to revise the 1978 ordinance by implementing a nighttime curfew on noisier Stage 2 aircraft (regardless of weight) and banning all nighttime maintenance

engine run-ups. FAA is now challenging both the original ordinance and its proposed amendment arguing that an outright ban of jet aircraft is unjustly discriminatory, a violation of equal protection under the U.S. Constitution, and an undue burden on interstate commerce.

When airport sponsors take actions that affect an airport user's access to the airport, FAA may investigate whether those actions appear to be inconsistent with the Federal law and the sponsor's grant assurances. If a noise complaint is filed, or if an initial informal investigation indicates noncompliance, FAA may conduct a formal investigation leading to a Director's Determination of the sponsor's compliance status. If the results go against the sponsor, the sponsor has a right of hearing, and there are appeal procedures as well. Ultimately, however, FAA can cut off Federal funding to an airport sponsor found to be in noncompliance, require return of grants provided to the airport and, in some cases, FAA can seek injunctive relief from the Federal courts as well. FAA may also have the legal ability—not exercised to date—to require the return of federal grants previously provided to the airport.

2.3.3.1.4 Federal Requirements for Limiting or Mitigating Noise Impacts in Areas Surrounding Airports

In its 1976 Noise Abatement Policy³, FAA states:

“State and local governments are uniquely responsible for ensuring that land use, zoning, and land development activities in areas surrounding airports are compatible with present and projected aircraft noise exposure in the area.”

FAA further indicates that entities with land use control responsibilities should work closely with airport operators in their planning efforts to confine serious aircraft noise exposure to within the airport boundary and reduce the number of people seriously affected by airport noise.

2.3.3.1.5 Federal Regulations for the Protection of Runway Approaches

Obstructions to air navigation can reduce the safety of aircraft approaching or taking-off from airports. Research conducted by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) indicates that areas adjacent to airports are more susceptible to aircraft accidents. Since the majority of accidents occur within 5,000 feet of a runway, the ability of pilots to land safely is impacted by the land uses surrounding the airport.

Both FAA and WSDOT's Aviation Division make it clear that it is the responsibility of local government to protect the health and welfare of its citizens. To limit damages to property and loss of life from aviation-related accidents, communities surrounding airports must be careful when they zone land uses and issue construction permits in areas adjacent to airports. In case of an accident, local jurisdictions may have

³ *Aviation Noise Abatement Policy 1976*, FAA.

to demonstrate that they exercised due diligence when they permitted certain land uses in close proximity to an airport. If the investigation shows that a jurisdiction did not follow best practices or disregarded recommendations it may be liable to legal action for damage recovery.

2.3.3.2 State Requirements

The Growth Management Act recognizes airports as Essential Public Facilities (EPF). Follow-up legislation, Senate Bill 6422, requires every local jurisdiction in the state that has a general aviation airport in its jurisdiction to discourage the siting of land uses that are incompatible with the operation of an airport. This legislation is codified in RCW 36.70.547:

“Every county, city, and town in which there is sited a general aviation airport that is operated for the benefit of the general public, whether publicly owned or privately owned public use, shall, through its comprehensive plan and development regulations, discourage the siting of incompatible uses adjacent to such general aviation airport. Such plans and regulations may only be adopted or amended after formal consultation with: Airport owners and managers, private airport operators, general aviation pilots, ports, and the Aviation Division of the Department of Transportation.”

2.3.4 The Local Context: Citizen and Community Issues Related to the Airport

The foregoing provided the national and regional context. This section of Chapter 2 provides the local context in which airport management and business decisions about Renton Municipal Airport must be made. The airport’s future, and its business development opportunities, will be impacted by the City’s decisions regarding the following issues. Issues include airport noise and steps tenants are already taking to combat noise, airspace constraints that affect the ability of FAA to manage air traffic within Renton’s airspace, an zoning and land use issues.

2.3.4.1 Noise

Noise from aircraft is an issue at almost every urban area airport nationwide, and has been for the past 30 years or more. In many cases, the airport was “there first”, before the community settled around it; indeed, there were efforts to site airports in undeveloped areas just for this reason, as well as for safer approaches. But a person buying land or a home near a small airport 30 or 40 years ago was often unable to see how that facility might grow. The development of jet aircraft, stemming from World War II, created a new kind of aviation noise. As population grew, airport activity grew, aided for several decades by tuition assistance for pilot training on the GI bill. As population grew, encroachment around the airports grew. Few communities were sufficiently far-sighted in the 1950s and 1960s to zone the land around their airports so that sensitive uses such as

housing, parks, daycares, senior centers, nursing homes and the like would not be permitted nearby. This problem persists today.

Noise issues raised by airport neighbors during hearings and council meetings related to new subleases on the airport were considered when the City Council decided to develop a Business Plan.

To address this problem on an ongoing basis, the City Council in 2001 established a Renton Airport Advisory Committee (RAAC) whose mission is to address airport noise. This committee has also been assigned the responsibility of reviewing this Business Plan, since the noise implications of the plan are a key consideration.

The noise problem at Renton is partly from touch-and-go training flights – the most common complaint of residents; partly from jets, partly from seaplane operations and partly from the noise of adjacent airports including Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, only 4 miles away, and Boeing Field/King County International Airport, also only 4 miles away and slightly further north. These are both very busy airports with much more jet traffic and night activity than Renton.

The airport tenants are aware of the noise concerns and many have undertaken steps on a voluntary basis to address and minimize them, often at considerable cost to themselves. The following indicates some of these actions.

Renton Municipal Airport is one of many airports in the country that has a voluntary noise abatement or “fly friendly” program. Pilots using the airport comply with take-off and landing procedures that are specifically designed to minimize noise impacts on neighbors, while ensuring the safety of both pilots and people on the ground. All airport tenants follow these procedures whenever possible. There are estimates indicating that about 700-800 pilots using the airport currently “fly friendly”. In addition to the voluntary noise abatement program, many airport tenants use other means to minimize noise impacts on neighbors. Figure 2-2 below outlines some of these measures.

2.3.4.2 Airspace Constraints

Renton Municipal Airport is surrounded by hills that are fully developed and mostly residential. Aircraft using both Boeing Field and Sea-Tac traverse the airspace above the City of Renton. This makes it sometimes difficult to determine whether noise issues are actually related to Renton Airport. The constrained airspace may cause some pilots accessing Renton to fly lower than they otherwise would to avoid having to communicate with Seattle Approach.

Figure 2-2: A Sample of Voluntary Noise Abatement Measures by Airport Tenants

Tenant	Voluntary Measure (in Addition to Noise Abatement Techniques)
Boeing	No engine run-ups between 6 PM and 8 AM, except occasionally up to 8 PM.
Ace Aviation	No maintenance on jets or other loud aircraft, although certified to do so.
Aero Pacific	Voluntary restriction on jet operations during the night and on the number of flights.
BEFA	Lead in developing and using voluntary noise abatement techniques to avoid the neighborhoods to the fullest extent consistent with safety.
Northwest Seaplanes	Retrofitted their 16 aircraft with three-blade propellers for noise reduction reasons. These cost \$20,000 each and generate no additional revenue for the operator.
Pro-Flight	Have a twin-engined training aircraft for advanced ratings training. No longer using it at Renton because of the noise concerns. Lost revenue in 2001 alone: \$40,000.
World Wind Helicopters	As a provider of air taxi and charter services with helicopters, the company has stringent pilot training requirements. It does not conduct any training at Renton but rather uses the Long Acres facility, in part to address neighbors' noise concerns.

Source: Tenant Interviews.

2.3.4.3 Zoning and Land Use

Increasing conflicts between the need to protect the viability and safe operation of an airport and the need for new housing and other noise-sensitive development near airports are a common problem throughout the U.S. Like many airports around the country, Renton Airport has seen tremendous growth in the surrounding areas. Not all (newly developed) land uses in the vicinity of the Airport appear compatible, raising both noise and safety concerns.

Under the State Growth Management Act, Renton is called upon to accommodate a greater population and higher densities. The City is pursuing this goal partly through new housing downtown and in other areas affected by the operation of the airport. This means, however, that some new residents will be at risk for noise exposure as new housing is built around the airport.

In addition to noise, the safety of both airport neighbors on the ground and pilots taking off or landing at the airport is an important issue. It needs to be addressed to ensure that the airport area is kept safe and to minimize the City's liability if an aircraft accident occurred in the approach zones.

One development considered problematic by airport tenants is currently occurring at the Shuffleton Steam Plant that was demolished in late September 2001. The project calls for the development of about 400 apartments, a hotel and three office towers. The development is located in the approach to the airport and will receive significant noise impact and almost certainly further exacerbate existing noise issues. Pilots have also expressed concerns about the safety of a large residential and office development in that location.

The neighborhood representatives on the RAAC made it very clear that noise is an issue although the noise levels attributable to the airport do not warrant land use adjustments if strictly based on FAA thresholds. Tenants expressed concerns that the City may not be taking adequate steps to protect the airport from land uses that are not compatible with the operation of the airport. The City administration is concerned that more proactive land use controls and zoning to protect the airport would make other land use considerations, such as accommodation of a larger population and higher densities, subordinate to airport uses.

However, FAA indicates that one of the responsibilities of an airport sponsor is to protect it from incompatible land uses. In Washington, general aviation airports are an Essential Public Facility (EPF) under the Growth Management Act and must be protected. Thus Renton must develop trade-off strategies to accommodate conflicting City goals and responsibilities.

The Aviation Division of the Washington State Department of Transportation provides guidelines to help protect airports from encroachment by housing and other unsuitable developments such as nursing homes, daycare facilities and other sensitive land uses; and to ensure both the safety of residents and pilots and continued existence of the airport. The bill establishing this process was passed in the 1990s⁴. In 2002, communities are required to update their Comprehensive Plans to address all legislation that has been passed post-GMA, including the airport protection legislation⁵. Both the Aviation Division of the Washington State Department of Transportation and the Office of Community Development provide support to local jurisdictions attempting to address this issue.

Currently, the airport itself is zoned medium industrial, and a needed comprehensive plan update that would allow aviation-related land uses on the airport has not been adopted. As of this writing, the City is in the process of developing the zoning regulations required to allow the airport to function within the industrial zone.

⁴ RCW 36.70.547.

⁵ RCW 36.70A.130 (1).