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## Airport update reflects aviation slowdown

By Marty Miller

The update to the master plan for Jefferson County Airport reflects much of the development activity happening in the northern area of the Denver metropolitan area.

The update still contains plans for growth, including another major runway, but that growth has been set back by a few years.

The airport administration is now projecting that there will be 290,000 landings and departures per year by the year 2007. The original master plan called for around 500,000 operations. Currently there are 145,000.

Nevertheless, the projects reflect a doubling in size of the airport in 20 years, Dave Gordon, airport manager indicated.

A public meeting on the update should be scheduled some time this fall, according to Gordon.

The final draft has been presented to the Federal Aviation Administration, which funds the five-year updates. It does not have to approve the update, Gordon said, but FAA is a major funding authority for airport projects.

A technical advisory committee supplied input into the update, according to Gordon. That committee included representatives from Boulder County, Jefferson County, Broomfield, Westminster, homeowners' associations, corporate entities like Interlocken, the state, Denver Regional Council of Governments and the FAA.

Although airport facilities remain unchanged from what was originally projected in the 1980 master plan, a controversial element of the update involved the additional runway and whether it should be included.

It would run parallel to the existing major runway and would enable the airport to handle additional traffic by al-

lowing two planes to take off or land simultaneously.

Besides the existing 9,000-foot runway, which can accommodate corporate jets, Jeffco has a smaller crosswind runway. Because of its capacity to handle air traffic, it is considered a reliever airport for Stapleton International.

The airport operates from

funds derived from user fees and finances its capitalimprovement projects through the FAA.

The proposed runway was controversial for a variety of reasons. Although it was included in the airport's 1980 master plan, the 1987 update is "being done when general aviation is in a downturn," explained Gordon.

"Projections for growth are down — they aren't nearly as high as those in 1980."

Since growth needs in an update are based on volume of traffic, the "FAA says 'you don't have enough activity to warrant'" the additional runway, said Gordon.

But "What we're saying is 'why take it off now and lose an opportunity to plan for it,'" he said.

The growth will eventually come, Gordon stressed. It is just coming slower than what was anticipated in 1980. He expressed confidence that the runway, if not included in this update, would simply reappear in one down the road.

But if it isn't included in the 1987 update, what has been lost is a control over ensuring that land uses near the airport — and the proposed new runway — are compatible.

"The whole key to a master plan is to let entities that have control over zoning be aware of our needs," said Gordon. "If they don't know the impact of an airport, we haven't done our job."

If an airport lacks the support of those entities, then it "won't grow; it will die," Gordon said.

"Incompatible land use is one of the worst things that can happen to an airport and to the people living around us. It's a two-way street. We have to live together because we have an impact on each other."

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*Incompatible land use is one of the worst things*

—**Dave Gordon**

The airport areas that cause the most impact are those nearest what is described as the approach/departure zones of the runways. Those not only carry the noise but may threaten safety since they are also the zones where airplane crashes would tend to occur on either landing or departure. The extent of those zones is determined by the length of the runway, which in turn effects the size of the aircraft using the airport.

A residential development in one of those zones could cause real problems. The airport, he

said, has an aviation easement whereby "users have the right to flyover it and make noise." A title search by a potential home buyer would reveal that.

"The problem is (the notice) won't prevent an aircraft from crashing. It doesn't prevent the homeowner from being satisfied with the easement. And the easement won't erase that dissatisfaction."

Thus, "you have an airport growing and developing. But people are still building houses off the end of the runways," Gordon said.

Those people put enough pressure on the governmental entities and the airport authority to curb that growth. That usually comes in the form of restrictions, according to Gordon. Its hours of operations may be cut back.

"Then companies aren't looking at the airport" as an asset when they are looking to relocate, according to Gordon. Yet, currently, Jeffco is a reason that some businesses have located in this area. And, he stressed, as the area continues to develop, more of the airport business will be commercial or corporate flights rather than pleasure flights by the private pilot.

"Currently, about 70 percent of the flights out of Jeffco are related to business," he said.

There are ways for an airport to co-exist with other users, according to Gordon.

The high-risk areas don't have to be farmland, Gordon said. "But there are ways it can be developed — commercial, industrial, golf courses, open spaces — that would minimize the impact" of an airport.

There are also actions the airport can take to minimize impact. One is what it did when Lac Amora was developed in northern Broomfield. It is in the departure path of the crosswind runway. That runway is used only when winds are 10 miles per hour or greater in an effort to limit traffic going north. That is an example, Gordon said, of "how we changed our procedures from the norm."

The key, according to Gordon, is a recognition that co-existence is a two-way street.

The FAA has agreed that the proposed runway can be included in the update but will withhold financial support until traffic volume warrants it, said Gordon. That is a position Jeffco can live with, he said.

"I see us needing to grow — the environment around us is conducive to it," said Gordon. The governmental entities have been cooperative, he added. "They see the benefit of having an airport here."

