

DVRPC NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER OF DELAWARE VALLEY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

SPECIAL AVIATION ISSUE

A healthy and efficient airport system is essential to the economy and mobility of this region. In addition to direct economic contributions from the airports themselves, many businesses rely on the aviation system to support their daily business activities.

DVRPC is responsible for planning for the adequacy of the airport system across twelve counties in four states: **Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery and Philadelphia** in Pennsylvania; **Burlington, Camden, Gloucester, Mercer and Salem** in New Jersey; **Cecil County, Maryland;** and **New Castle County, Delaware.** DVRPC's Office of Aviation Planning works closely with the FAA, state Departments of Transportation, airport operators, and local and regional officials to maintain a vibrant system of commercial, reliever and general aviation airports.

Security concerns in the years since the September 11 tragedy have only heightened the importance of regional cooperation and aviation planning. This special issue of DVRPC News addresses some of the regional and national issues in aviation, as well as DVRPC's efforts in this arena.

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DVRPC STUDIES AIRPORT LAND USE COMPATIBILITY


Airports are dependent on their neighbors to foster compatible land use on surrounding properties.

All airports in the DVRPC planning area impact the land that surrounds them, and their operations are affected by incompatible land uses. Ideally, the land around airports that is not owned by the public or private airport owner should be used in a manner that does not create conflict with the airport. Land use must take into consideration the impact of airport noise on potential residences or high density congregations of people. Farming, a park, or light industrial uses are encouraged, as they blend well with airports.

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Both New Jersey and Pennsylvania have state laws restricting heights of structures and natural growth around airports through required local zoning, conforming to specific imaginary surfaces in the sky as projected down to the ground. The nature of fixed-wing aircraft operations require approaches and departures from airports at a very gradual ascent or descent. Consequently, the height of trees, buildings and towers on adjoining land must be controlled in order not to endanger or restrict aircraft operations.

Although both states mandate land use restrictions around airports, neither state has the required legal jurisdiction regarding control of off-airport private land development. Instead, local zoning provides that control. In Pennsylvania, the Bureau of Aviation has for years noted that only a small percentage of townships with airports, or near airports, have instituted height zoning as required by state law. Compatible airport land use planning or zoning has generally been completely overlooked by municipalities. In Pennsylvania and New Jersey, DVRPC has noted a significant and worsening trend toward conflicting use of land adjoining airports, resulting in airport operation restrictions or ultimate closure. In order to preserve the regional and state airport systems for the future, this trend must be reversed or at least halted.

To this end, PENNDOT has requested that DVRPC do a prototype analysis of zoning/land use and municipal decision-making regarding suburban airports in Bucks, Chester and Montgomery counties. This analysis aims to identify issues and process deficiencies and land use conflicts. This information will then be used to develop strategies and incentives for implementing municipal zoning/land use laws and policies that would protect airports while optimizing the land owners' use of their properties. Results of the DVRPC study will provide guidance and direction to the state-wide analysis to be done by consultants for PENNDOT. The DVRPC study was initiated in March 2004 and will be completed in October 2004. 



AVIATION PLANNING GLOSSARY OF TERMS:

▼ Block Grants

Federal money given to the state for distribution to airports for capital improvements. Of the four states in DVRPC's jurisdiction, Pennsylvania is the only one that currently receives Block Grants. Grants are administered at the federal level in the other states.

▼ CASP-20 Grant

Continuing Airport System Program. This grant from the FAA funds aviation planning (as opposed to capital funding). CASP-20 is the 20th such grant DVRPC has received.

▼ Commercial Airports

Airports offering scheduled flights. Includes major airports such as Philadelphia International, and smaller airports such as Trenton-Mercer or Atlantic City. These airports consume the majority of federal grants and local bond funding spent in the aviation system.

▼ FAA

Federal Aviation Administration. Oversees airport funding programs, pilot licensing, air traffic control and technology advancement.

▼ General Aviation Airports

Primarily small, suburban airports that allow for corporate, private and recreational use, with a focus on recreational flights. General Aviation airports are not eligible for federal funds, unless they are publicly owned.

▼ RASP

Regional Airport System Plan for the Delaware Valley. Developed by DVRPC, the RASP identifies long-range goals, recommendations and trends for aviation in our region.

▼ Reliever Airports


Primarily small, suburban airports that allow for corporate, private, and recreational use, with a focus on corporate and charter flights. Reliever airports are eligible for federal funds whether they are publicly or privately owned.

▼ State Departments of Transportation (DOT)

The Divisions of Aviation within each state's DOT oversees airport inspections, state funding programs and licensing issues.

▼ Transportation Security Administration

Federal agency that oversees security at all public use airports.



DVRPC LEADS GENERAL AVIATION SAFETY STUDY

While the entire country was changed on September 11, 2001, some of the most lasting impacts have been on the aviation industry. In light of security and terrorism issues, the FAA provided DVRPC funding through our CASP 20 grant to complete a security-related study of all 22 general aviation and reliever airports in the region, as well as Capital City Airport in the Harrisburg region. The CTI Corporation was hired as a consultant to analyze the region's airports according to security risk. Existing security procedures were inventoried and evaluated. Deficiencies in airport facilities and procedures were identified, and strategies to lower risk, both procedural and construction-related, were suggested.

As this study was conducted, DVRPC's objectives of preserving and enhancing the non-commercial airport infrastructure were at the forefront. In anticipation of the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) review of risks at these airports, DVRPC is seeking effective procedural solutions to reduce the risk of terrorism. Through the preparation of this regional security profile, DVRPC hopes to negotiate with TSA to avoid federally unfunded mandates requiring expensive capital expenditure or restricted aircraft movements, which could shut down small airports and drive aviation business out of the region.

CTI Corporation completed surveys in March 2004, with participation from New Jersey and Pennsylvania Departments of Transportation. Summary reports and security profiles/strategies for all 23 airports will be available in July 2004.✈

DVRPC'S 2030 REGIONAL AIRPORT SYSTEM PLAN PREPARATION UNDERWAY

Beginning in the fall of 2004, DVRPC will initiate the update of the Regional Airport System Plan (RASP) for the four-state, twelve-county Philadelphia metropolitan planning area. The RASP takes a general look at the regional aviation system and produces overall regional aviation system and facility-specific recommendations and development goals. The 2030 RASP will supersede the 2025 plan developed in 1999-2000.

Since 2000, several major events and trends have impacted aviation infrastructure in ways which require modification to long-range plans. The threat of terrorism has resulted in a decrease in commercial and general aviation traffic, placing strain on airport revenues and increasing security costs. Encroaching development has led to several privately owned general aviation airports threatening closure or preparing for public acquisition. Philadelphia International Airport is planning for major capacity expansion while most runway extensions in the suburbs, with the exception of Wings Field in Montgomery County, have been thwarted by local political opposition. Federal and state capital funding programs have undergone significant changes— including increasing the minimum number of aircraft for an airport to qualify for federal funds, and reducing the match funds small airports must supply— that have created some new opportunities for smaller airports while discouraging other plans. Finally, local zoning and land use inconsistencies must be addressed in order to preserve, and at some locations, improve the safety and capacity of our suburban airport infrastructure.

The 2030 RASP will reflect these trends, issues and opportunities while providing a plan for an optimal future regional aviation system for the mobility and economic prosperity of our citizens and business community. DVRPC staff will solicit input from a broad spectrum of private and public agencies— including the Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware Departments of Transportation, county and municipal officials, private airport owners, and operators community leaders, pilots and surface transportation organizations — in order to create this comprehensive plan for the region.✈

REDEFINING AVIATION MARKET AREAS THROUGHOUT NORTHEAST CORRIDOR

Recognizing the interdependency of airport systems, the FAA, Eastern Region, has invited DVRPC to participate with the New York State Department of Transportation and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey in a three-state nine-airport systems study. The study will redefine market areas and determine if commercial passengers could be redistributed more optimally throughout New Jersey, the New York City area, and southeastern Pennsylvania airports. Included in the study are **Newark Liberty, J.F. Kennedy** and **LaGuardia** airports in the Port Authority region; **Atlantic City, Lehigh Valley International** and **Trenton-Mercer** airports in the DVRPC area; and **MacArthur, Stewart International**, and **West Chester County** airports in southern New York State.

DVRPC INCREASES ROLE IN PA AIRPORT CAPITAL PROGRAMMING

Two years ago, DVRPC's Office of Aviation Planning received a grant from the FAA to analyze Block Grant status for Pennsylvania airports. In 2003, DVRPC submitted its findings, which identified procedural problem areas in project funding and provided suggestions for their correction. From this effort, PennDOT's Bureau of Aviation (BOA) asked DVRPC to provide a regional Airport Capital Improvement Program (ACIP) as input to guide their annual grant distribution effort. A Draft 2003 ACIP was submitted to and accepted by BOA as a support document in the grant distribution process this past February. While DVRPC has made general recommendations for funding in the past, this reflects the first time that DVRPC has provided project-specific direction for distributing grants.

For the upcoming 2004 Pennsylvania ACIP, DVRPC anticipates an even greater role. While DVRPC's recommendations were used as a guide last year, this year DVRPC planners will actually develop the 2004 PA ACIP for all eligible airports in the five PA counties in our region. This change will give BOA planners and engineers more time to tend to lesser-represented airports in the state, without compromising the interests of the Delaware Valley Region airports. In offering this level of input, DVRPC's traditional scope of work will widen to include more detailed project engineering and scheduling analysis, and introduce more collaboration with the airports and BOA to develop an ACIP not just for the benefit of this Region but also for the entire State. This DVRPC initiative will support BOA staff and help represent PA's most active regional airports in the competition for state and national project funding. In addition, DVRPC staff will monitor project preparation and progress throughout the funding cycle to help avoid the lapsing of grants.

All three major airports in the New York market are at or exceeding capacity to handle scheduled flights. Delays resulting from insufficient airport or airspace capacity are normal. The ultimate objective of this study is to determine if some of the passenger traffic using Newark, Kennedy or LaGuardia could be better accommodated at the six small commercial airports to the north or south of NYC, all of which currently have excess capacity. Physical design features of these six airports will be studied to determine available capacity or projects which will improve capacity. Also airline route and fare structure modifications will be suggested to provide competitive service at the outlying airports. The study will proceed in two phases: first, to define potential airport markets geographically, and second, to determine capacity potential and needed service modification. This work will continue into 2008.

DVRPC'S AIRCRAFT OPERATIONS COUNTING PROGRAM

Since 1986, DVRPC has used noise-activated equipment to provide reliable aircraft operation estimates for our 22 non-towered airports. This data is used by consultants for their Master Plan and Airport Layout Plan preparation, by the airports for their internal business plans and related analysis, as well as by the FAA and the state Departments of Transportation for their System Plans preparation and operations forecasts.

The FAA provides funding for up to eight regional airports to be surveyed each year through this Aircraft Operations Counting Program. In 1996, DVRPC was contracted by the State of New Jersey to survey an additional 24 non-towered airports every two years, resulting in a three-to-four year counting cycle per airport in the region. Since 1992, the program has used computer software-based technology and equipment from Larson and Davis Inc. for its data collection. Although previous technologies produced the same reliable and comparable results, the new counters allow a reduced labor cost and are much easier to handle and transport.

The equipment consists of a handheld noise meter connected to a 12 volt battery which are inclosed in a 12"x18"x6" weatherproof carrying case with an omni surround microphone arm attachment. This unit can be placed easily and safely along the runway, at about midfield, to collect noise data from takeoff movements of each aircraft. Each counter remains at the airport for one week per setting. Eight total settings are placed strategically over one calendar year, for two settings within each season. The data of each setting is then downloaded into the Acoustic Counter Software (ACS), and from there is formatted into a spreadsheet of weekly counts displaying aircraft operations by hour and day. Staff then extrapolates this data into a usable report format including weekly, seasonal and annual takeoff and landing totals.

Reports are available from the DVRPC publications desk at 215-238-2828 for each year of survey since 1986.



ADVANCING PENN'S LANDING HELIPORT PROJECT

For twenty years, DVRPC Regional Airport System Plans have recognized the importance of having a public use heliport to serve businesses in Center City Philadelphia. While Sterling Heliport, operating on one third of an old maritime pier on Columbus Boulevard at Spruce Street, has served this business function for most of that time, it is becoming overcrowded. The heliport is used by state police, news media helicopters and even the President to connect Philadelphia to New York, Washington D.C. and other business centers within 100 miles. With the increased threat of urban-related terrorism, emergency preparedness and the mobility of critical governmental officials and management services are new roles required of the Center City-based heliport.

Given the increasing demand and customer base for helicopter service and Central Business District access provided

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by Sterling, the heliport no longer has sufficient space for itinerant vehicle parking or for necessary takeoffs and landings. Preliminary engineering has resulted in plans for extending the pier to its original length to accommodate demand, at a cost of \$10 million. To qualify for the FAA grants needed to fund this endeavor, the operator must designate a public sponsor and complete an environmental assessment (EA) to insure no adverse impacts on the environment, local residents, and institutions on both sides of the Delaware River. The Penn's Landing Corporation, operator

of the public facilities on the river, has agreed to sponsor the EA study. In February 2004, DVRPC and Sterling Heliport staff met with the Urban Waterfront Action Group (UWAG) representing the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and other agencies to define or “scope” needed elements in the EA to satisfy concerns about alternative sites, noise, fish life, marine navigation, airspace safety, etc. Meanwhile, FAA and PENNDOT are considering funding options and phasing of the project, which would proceed with successful completion of the EA. Ultimately, an expanded heliport will serve existing and future demand for air access to Center City, while contributing to the relief of air traffic at Philadelphia International Airport. ☁

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Since its establishment in 1965, DVRPC has been instrumental in ensuring the orderly growth of the bi-state region. As the federally-funded metropolitan planning organization, DVRPC also provides data and consulting services to public and private sector organizations, and fosters cooperation among all levels of government. Shown above is the nine-county Delaware Valley region.

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