

Chapter 7 - Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

The Connecticut Statewide Airport System Plan (CSASP) documents existing conditions at Connecticut airports. This plan identifies what is necessary to meet current and future air transportation needs so that a viable, balanced and integrated system of airports that will continue to serve the state's residents, businesses and visitors in a safe, efficient and cost effective manner can be established. Because the aviation system operates as a whole, it has been analyzed as such. This chapter makes recommendations based on the entire system. Recommendations on specific projects are identified in each airports master plan (not included in this report).

The Connecticut Statewide Aviation System is comprised of 23 airports that are open to the public, 6 state owned, 4 municipally owned and 13 privately owned. There are a variety of sizes and types, such as a large airport with many air carriers including international service, regional airports with commercial service, airports with a large amount of corporate operations and airports that serve mainly single engine aircraft. Changes in activity at one airport affects the type and volume of activity at other airports.

The goals of this plan are to continue efforts to support all public use airports in the State, provide a safe and efficient air transportation system for Connecticut, provide and maintain a statewide aviation system which addresses the needs of all aviation users, improve and refine existing policies to determine which aviation initiatives should receive support for funding and implementation, and continue efforts to develop Bradley International Airport (BDL) as a world class facility. The recommendations in this chapter will help attain these goals.

7.1.1 Recommendations for the National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS)

As part of creating the CSASP, the Federal Aviation Administrations (FAA) NPIAS was reviewed to determine if any changes should be recommended. If it is determined that changes are needed, the system plan will make recommendations for the FAA to review and act on. In Connecticut there are 15 airports included in the 2005-2009 NPIAS, three "Primary and Commercial Service Airports" and 12 "Reliever and General Aviation Airports". One of these General Aviation airports listed in the NPIAS is Mountain Meadow Airstrip that existed in the Towns of Harwinton and Burlington. This airport closed in April 2004. This CSASP is recommending the removal of Mountain Meadow Airstrip from the NPIAS and the inclusion of Skylark Airport in the Town of East Windsor. Skylark Airport has over 50 based aircraft and offers many amenities such as aircraft storage and flight instruction among other activities. Another change that may be recommended is the modification of Simsbury Tri-Town Airports designation in the NPIAS from a General Aviation Airport to a Reliever Airport for BDL. Simsbury Tri-

Town has approximately 50 aircraft based at the facility and offers many aviation amenities that make it an attractive reliever to BDL.

Recommendations:

- Remove Mountain Meadow Airport from the NPIAS
- Recommend to FAA to add Skylark Airport as a General Aviation Airport to the NPIAS
- Recommend to FAA to change Simsbury Tri-Town Airports designation from a General Aviation airport to a Reliever Airport.

7.1.2 Capacity

The existing system provides adequate capacity to meet today's operational demands. FAA recommends a detailed analysis of airport capacity be performed for airports at 60 percent of their capacity. Capacity improvements should be in place when an airport reaches 80 percent capacity. In 2025, BDL and Danbury (DXR) are expected to be approaching 80 percent capacity. Since these two airports are presently approaching 60 percent capacity, studies to manage this issue should be planned in the near future.

There are a number of airport facility improvements that can be implemented to enhance capacity. Each airport must be reviewed to identify cost-effective modifications that will improve capacity without compromising safety. These improvements include taxiways, exit ramps, NAVAIDS, and approaches. Streamlining changes in operating procedures can also increase capacity. These types of improvements are addressed in individual airport master plans.

In the near term all airports are expected to have adequate terminal capacity to accommodate the projected increase in passenger traffic. However by 2025, both BDL and Tweed-New Haven (HVN) are expected to need improvements to the passenger terminals. Recent Master Plans for each of these airports identify this issue.

In 2004 the airports owned by the State handled over 50% of annual operations in Connecticut, while the municipal airports accommodated 30%, and the privately owned public use facilities handled 20%. In 2025, forecasts indicate that the State airports will handle 52%, municipal 31% and private 17% of the annual operations. The total numbers of operations is expected to increase by 356,700, or 42% by 2025.

Most cargo flights in Connecticut use BDL. If an airport in a surrounding state were to see a large increase in their cargo service it would probably not affect the existing service at BDL, but it could prohibit the growth that BDL is trying to encourage.

There is a projected increase of 303 based aircraft by the year 2025. Of that, 255 are expected to be at the six State and four municipal airports. Of these, only six facilities are expected to have an additional 25 or more based aircraft during the analysis period.

These include Hartford-Brainard (HFD), Danielson (5B3) and Bridgeport-Sikorski (BDR), with Groton (GON) and Oxford (OXC) projected to see an increase of over 40 based aircraft. Each airport should plan for these increases in their respective master plans. If any of these airports cannot accommodate the projected increase in based aircraft, those aircraft may have to be located at surrounding airports. While the distribution of aircraft around the state can be beneficial, it can cause a financial burden to smaller airports when they want to expand their tie down or T-hanger space to accommodate the aircraft. Some airports have limited land available for expansion.

Some of the smaller airports may handle only a small percentage of the statewide operations and based aircraft, but steps should be taken to preserve them. They serve mainly recreational pilots of single engine planes, but also play a role in other areas including, public health and safety, such as Lifestar (medical emergency helicopter services) and law enforcement, military training, and flight training. Most of the State and municipal airports started out as small airports. It would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to build a new airport on new location in Connecticut. The ability to expand an existing airport would be challenging, but achievable.

Recommendations:

- ❑ Capacity studies for BDL and DXR in the near future
- ❑ BDL and HVN terminal capacity should be reviewed in subsequent master plans.
- ❑ Aggressively market cargo growth at BDL
- ❑ In the next master plans for BDR, DXR, GON, HFD and OXC, additional based aircraft storage capacity should be addressed.
- ❑ Financial aid for smaller airports to accommodate a large influx of based aircraft, if the larger airports are built out.
- ❑ Regularly review each airport as part of the system to identify capacity improvements.
- ❑ Investigate ways to preserve smaller airports.

7.1.3 Scheduled Commercial Service Change

BDL has seen improvements recently and with the new terminal is able to serve more airlines. Marketing is being done to bring more airlines to the facility. The increasing cost of maintaining scheduled service at Connecticut's regional airports is a concern for both the State system and the national system. Airlines are continually reassessing their role in the industry to determine where to operate from to have the largest profit margin. Many airlines are aggressively modifying the way they do business, such as changing to regional jets, and continually changing their routes to see which are the most profitable. If scheduled service were to be reduced at our regional airports where would the users go; would Connecticut lose them to surrounding states? How would area businesses be impacted? If scheduled service were to dramatically increase at our regional airports, it would likely compliment the other services in the State.

An issue that may be a factor in increasing scheduled service at regional airports is the runway length and runway safety area's (RSA). FAA mandates RSA's but because of coastal wetland issues at regional airports like GON, HVN and BDR it is difficult to implement full RSA's without reducing runway length. Passenger planes need a certain runway length for safe operation. It is difficult to maintain a balance for both.

Recommendations:

- ❑ Promote BDL as a world class facility
- ❑ Encourage airlines to use Connecticut's airports for scheduled service
- ❑ Seek out additional airlines to consider BDL and HVN

7.1.4 Changes in Policy

Changes in aviation policy can have drastic and unintended effects on an airport's operation. An example of this could be Federal security mandates for both commercial and general aviation airports. Since the events of September 11, 2001 and its devastating effects on the airline industry, security at airports has been in a state of flux. New policies enhancing security are continually being added to ensure the transport of goods and the safety of the travelling public. Airports must follow these mandates, although initially many were established but not funded. This puts a huge financial strain on airports, many had to push the timeframe of other projects back to redirect those funds for security updates. For smaller airports that do not receive federal funding, this could be devastating. The Transportation Security Administration has published security guidelines for general aviation airports. Presently these guidelines are not cost intensive, however, this could change if an update is needed. If an airport cannot raise the capital to fund a big project, such as perimeter fencing, they may be forced to close.

Because of their importance, a close watch should be kept on Federal policy decisions to determine what affect(s) they may have on Connecticut's system and to determine how it can be addressed. Any changes in State policy that may affect the aviation system should be reviewed thoroughly to determine its potential effects. One change that could be beneficial is to work with DEP to streamline the environmental permitting process. Several airports are in the Coastal Area Management Zone and with the need for RSA's it would be helpful to streamline this process. Airport projects are different from highway projects as runways are already in place (based on established operating criteria) making it difficult to shift the project one way or the other to avoid or minimize impacts. Most airports in Connecticut have wetland areas located on their property.

Recommendations:

- ❑ Provide funding for security measures to public use airports not eligible for federal funding.
- ❑ Continually review Federal and State policies that may affect the aviation system.
- ❑ Investigate the opportunity to streamline the permitting process
- ❑ Continually review Federal and State Security policies to determine their affect on Connecticut's aviation system.

7.1.5 Specific examples of problems

A major concern of any aviation system, is the closure of an airport and the impact that would have on the system. When an airport closes the aircraft and operations redistribute throughout the system. That could cause problems for the system as a whole. The magnitude of those problems would depend on the size of the closing airport and the number of airports remaining in the system. Airports most likely to close are usually the privately owned, public use airports because operating costs may exceed income. Many of these airports operate on a very limited budget without the benefit of grants from the state or federal government. Owners may decide that the property is more valuable as a different use, thereby closing the airport.

Mountain Meadow Airport located in the Towns of Burlington and Harwinton was a privately owned open to the public airport that closed in April 2004. The airport was under two different owners, one owned the runway and the other owned the buildings and tie down area. The owner of the property containing the runway decided to put that property to a different use. This airport had only about 23 based aircraft and 13,000 operations so this closing did not have a substantial impact to the system. However, pilots from that area will have to travel farther to surrounding airports such as Robertson Field, Waterbury-Oxford, and Simsbury Tri-town. Mountain Meadow was the northwestern most public use airport in the State, leaving that section of Connecticut without a public use airport.

There are other privately owned airports that, if they were to close, would likely burden the system. Examples of these are Robertson Field, Skylark Airpark and Chester Airport, which have 110, 71 and 110 based aircraft respectively¹. It would be difficult for surrounding airports to absorb that many based aircraft and the number of operations they create. Most airports need time and money to build more hangars or tie downs and some may not have the land available to expand. This may force aircraft and pilots to relocate out of the state, having a negative affect on the State's economy.

If an airport is being sold, municipalities may consider purchasing the property. Airports owned by municipalities are eligible for federal and state funds. In the case of Mountain Meadow the owner did not want to sell to the Town and the townspeople voted not to take the property by eminent domain.

Dual ownership and other ownership issues are a problem at many airports. BDR is owned by the Town of Bridgeport but located in the Town of Stratford. This causes controversy that affects the operation of the airport. Mountain Meadow Airport was another example of struggles due to ownership issues. Several airports in Connecticut are located in two or more Towns, such as HVN, located in New Haven and East Haven, and Meriden/Markham, located in Meriden and Wallingford, both are municipal airports.

¹ These airports are identified due to their number of based aircraft or operations and the burden this may put on the system, not because it is felt that they may be closing.

Another ownership problem may occur when the owner of the airport property is not the one operating the airport. It is very important for the agreement between these parties to be clear. The operator doesn't want to be spending money making improvements unless they are assured the airport property will remain an airport for years to come. In addition, if the operator does not make certain improvements, or there is even a threat of discontinuing airport operations, the airport may become less attractive to pilots, which would have a negative impact on business.

Other privately owned open to the public airports are in danger of closing. With each closing additional strain is imposed on the remaining airports and the cumulative affect increases. Owners are finding the rising cost of maintaining the infrastructure of an airport to be problematic. In today's real estate market, the land on which an airport resides can be very valuable for development. The State needs to find ways to assist the owners with such things as safety, security and maintenance costs so these airports can stay in operation. It would cost the State a considerable financial investment if state owned airports would have to expand to accommodate planes displaced by the closure of privately owned public use airports.

Many airports in Connecticut have obstruction issues. Trees grow and pose a hazard for the flying public. Easements need to be implemented that allow the airport sponsor to deal with this issue before it becomes a problem. Trees can be topped or taken down and replaced with a species that will not grow tall and therefore not obstruct the airspace. Managing trees is difficult and sensitive due to environmental concerns and the fact that many are on private property. Trees and other obstructions are a safety issue for both the flying public and Connecticut's residents. Obstructions that are not taken care of in a timely manner can change the operating characteristics of an airport

. Another reason operating characteristics may change could be due to insufficient space to create federally required runway safety areas (RSA). Both of these problems may bring about reduced runway length through displaced thresholds or a change in approach minimums. This could have a substantial negative affect on the aircraft that operate at the airport. The type and size of aircraft that normally use the airport might choose to relocate because that aircraft cannot physically operate at that airport under those conditions. This would cause lost income for that airport as well as problems for the system if other airports do not have the ability to accommodate the relocated aircraft. They may not have the hangar or tie down space, the necessary fuel or adequate runway length or be too far away from the business they serve or home of the pilot. It is good planning practice to keep a continual watch on the activities at airports throughout the state to be as prepared as possible for any of these scenarios.

Changes in activities at one airport affect the type and volume of demand at other airports. For example as corporate activities at certain airports increase, smaller recreational pilots may prefer to relocate to an airport that serves mainly the single engine, piston driven airplanes.

Recommendations:

- ❑ Provide adequate storage for aircraft – if some airports were to close
- ❑ Find ways to assist smaller, public use airports stay in business
- ❑ Promote resolution of Ownership issues – dual ownership, multiple municipalities, owner/operator
- ❑ Investigate low interest state loans for safety improvements and maintenance at privately owned public use airports.
- ❑ Obstruction, easement issues - possible legislation
- ❑ Monitor airport activities to be prepared for possible changes

7.1.6 Safety

Obstructions are a major concern for the safety of everyone in and around an airport. Efforts to remove or light any obstructions should continue to receive high priority.

Ongoing airfield improvements such as RSAs, taxiways, upgraded lighting systems, NAVAIDS, hanger storage, and GPS approaches are planned to help increase safety, efficiency, and accessibility. Maintenance of pavement, lighting and NAVAIDS is also very important for safety. These issues should be addressed in individual airport master plans. The possibility of low interest loans for these safety issues to privately owned public use airports should be investigated before some are forced out of business because of high operating and maintenance costs.

Security has been increased to its most stringent ever, which is a costly but necessary change. Security issues are an on-going concern and continue to be reviewed and enhanced.

Recommendations:

- ❑ Obstruction concerns (and removal) should be a high priority.
- ❑ Continued emphasis on safety and security improvements in each master plan.
- ❑ Possible state funding for public use airports that do not qualify now.
- ❑ Continued support for the development of RSA's at all public use airports.

7.1.7 Land use /zoning

Airport and community compatibility is a recurring issue for planners, local officials and airport authorities. Much of the conflict between airports and surrounding land use could be avoided with proper zoning. In Connecticut, land use zoning within the geographic boundary of each municipality is under the authority of that municipality. It is important for local planning and zoning boards to consider the potential impacts and contributions an airport may have. Each town's comprehensive plan should acknowledge airports in the area and consider their existing and future roles within that framework. Zoning designations should be established to help make the surrounding land use compatible. This protects the airport as well as neighbors.

Appropriate zoning around an airport is important to minimize impacts. The major impact at most airports is noise. Compatible uses near an airport include commercial and some industrial uses. Highly noise sensitive land uses such as hospitals, churches, schools and residences should be avoided. Other uses that might be tolerant of noise may not be appropriate for other reasons. Landfills, agricultural uses, bird refuge, and ponds could attract birds and wildlife that may be hazardous for aircraft. Industrial uses that might produce significant quantities of smoke, dust, steam or bright lights may not be appropriate.

The FAA has adopted standards for determining obstructions to air navigation and they have established RPZ and approach criteria. These standards safeguard the operation of aircraft in, out and around an airport. The FAA determines which objects penetrate the surfaces and whether they should be lighted or removed. In order to protect the utilization of an airport, cities and towns are encouraged to adopt height restriction ordinances that define and provide for the establishment of various zones and height limitations for each zone based on Federal Aviation Regulations Part 77 Objects Affecting Navigable Airspace. Locations of new cell phone towers should be carefully reviewed. Vegetation management plan studies are underway for each state owned airport.

Airport sponsors need to service and maintain certain equipment that may be located off of airport property such as outer markers, and lights on poles, trees, or hills. It should be clear who is responsible for maintenance of these items and that the appropriate easements are in place to allow access.

Recommendations:

- ❑ Educate local officials of the benefits of appropriate zoning around airports.
- ❑ Is legislation necessary to specify permitted land uses and zoning to include height restrictions?
- ❑ Take steps to preserve and protect the designated airspace and keep approaches obstruction free.
- ❑ Establish a timeframe for periodic review of vegetation management plans for State airports.
- ❑ Standardize easements for access to allow maintenance and or removal, when necessary.
- ❑ Cooperation between Town officials and airport sponsors

7.1.8 Funding

In order to be eligible for federal funding, an airport must be included in the NPIAS and be publicly owned or designated as a reliever airport. Privately owned open to the public airports not designated a reliever, are not eligible. The State should review the criteria to determine if any other airports could be eligible for inclusion as a reliever in the NPIAS.

Airports that accept federal funds agree to certain conditions. It is likely they will remain open during the 20 year time frame that the loan covers, if not, they would have to repay grants they received from FAA. Connecticut should support legislation for federal funding programs for airports.

Due to increasing operating costs, smaller airports may not be able to afford to make necessary improvements. If an airport closes the aircraft and associated businesses may relocate out of state. Connecticut would want to provide for adequate tie down and T-hangar areas to prevent the displaced aircraft from leaving the State. This would cost the State money, therefore it makes sense for the State to offer smaller airports who are not eligible for federal funding, some kind of grant or low interest loan program to help them stay in operation, keeping the state's aviation system intact.

The State should continue to fund as many individual airport development projects identified in each airport Master Plan as possible with the present level of funding and encourage an increase in this funding. Also investigate ways to encourage innovative local government funding and stress the significant contribution airports have on the States economy.

Privately owned airports are competing with other more lucrative land uses. With the loss of each airport the burden on the remaining airports increases. The State should support the preservation of the aviation system that we have, as these airports will be needed in the future for aviation system resources.

Recommendations:

- ❑ Support legislation for federal funding programs for airports
- ❑ Provide State grant or low interest loan programs for public use airports
- ❑ Encourage State legislation to allocate more funds for airport safety and security improvements
- ❑ Routinely and in a clear and concise manner present the benefits of general aviation to legislators and local officials
- ❑ Preserve the existing State aviation system
- ❑ Perform a study to determine the economic impact of Connecticut's public use airports on the State and their local community.

7.1.9 Public awareness

There are several ways to encourage a good relationship between an airport and the community it serves. Public awareness of the importance of proper zoning in the vicinity of the airport would benefit both parties. The airport sponsor may want to offer community relations programs to inform town officials and the public as to what the airport offers. Some examples include, inviting the public to a special day when the airport and its tenants give tours and explain what they do, form an Advisory Committee to meet periodically to facilitate the flow of information from the airport sponsor to the neighbors, a newsletter or website which explains the benefits of a general aviation

airport, such as it's use for emergency medical flights, law enforcement, military training, and flight training. Educational opportunities in aeronautics should be promoted.

These and other community relations programs need to stress the contributions airports make to a community. They are an important resource providing health, safety, transportation and economic benefits. The public should be aware of what the airport contributes to the community, how it is funded and that the Town receives monies for having a State airport within it boundaries. Many times the only contact the public has with an airport is when they hear a plane fly overhead. A brochure explaining how the FAA measures aircraft noise and what can be done to minimize the effect on the public could be beneficial, especially to those living in close proximity to the airport. The airport sponsors should do all they can to promote a positive public image for the airport.

Recommendations:

- ❑ Develop programs to educate and inform the public as well as Town Officials of the benefits of airports
- ❑ Promote airports through public programs, brochures, website, newsletters, etc.
- ❑ Stress safety related aspects of an airport as they relate to the community
- ❑ Encourage educational opportunities on aeronautics.
- ❑ Review neighborhood concerns vs. airport operations
- ❑ Explain how the FAA measures noise and how it can be minimized
- ❑ Promote a positive public image of airports