

February 5, 2025

Dear Chairwoman Stephens and the State Aviation Board,

I am a member of Aurora State Airport PAC and PAAM associations, Charbonneau board member, and chair of its civic affairs committee and transportation task force. Our community, part of the city of Wilsonville, has been interested in the new Airport Master Plan from the outset.

That this has been many years in the making is itself a testament to the trials of Aurora State Airport. I think it's fair to say that it's taken a toll on everyone involved, from airport operators, business owners, officials within the various jurisdictions, and the citizen stakeholders of the surrounding communities. And it seems, it's a plan without a home, since the cost of bringing the constrained Aurora airport up to FAA standards is 'significantly expensive.' In layman's terms it's called a boondoggle.

The estimated cost, the proposed changes to local and state roadways, unreasonable nature of property acquisition, and ramp to years of expensive litigation make this plan reckless and irresponsible. It's obvious that there is no way this can be justified for any general aviation airport.' The Airport Master Plan for Aurora State Airport is nothing short of a travesty. At what point does the board say enough is enough? The locals have been loudly saying that. for years.

Was it bureaucracy run amuck? Politics? Behind the scenes manipulation of officials by self-interested parties? Whatever got us to this point, it's clear that what's now before PAC is totally unacceptable. This compounds the earlier bomb that dropped this summer, stating the airfield must conform to C-II, not B-II standards, which reduced the alternative designs to three. This came at a PAC meeting less than 48 hours after showing, and asking the public to pick among seven alternatives. Both of these significant revelations display serious communication breakdowns that crashes trust about the process, its intentions, goals, and ODAV itself.

As someone who has been in the business world my entire career, while serving on numerous corporate and nonprofit boards, the absence of due diligence in financial projections, budgets, return on investment, cost-benefit analysis, financial performance metrics, cost of capital, and source of funding displays a level of incompetency only matched by its irresponsibility.

Aurora State Airport is a constrained site. It makes no sense to spend tens of millions at this location, when other airfields within minutes of minutes of flying time already meet those standards. Go back to the drawing board and find a solution that works for more parties. That works for those underutilized airports in our region that are ready-made for large aircraft, airfreight, charters, executive jets, air commuting, and unmanned drones, that already meet FAA standards. That works for Aurora's neighboring communities who don't want more air traffic, noise and risks to our safety. That works for agricultural businesses threatened by airport expansion. The economic impact of less transient and large jet use is far less than the costs associated with expanding Aurora State Airport. And the jobs currently at the airport will largely be unaffected. In fact, without the threat of ODAV's growth ambitions, employers might be more inclined to hire to grow their businesses..

ODAV, along with FAA's checkbook, has spent \$1 million getting to this point. ODAV is currently using and seeking more tax-payer money from Oregon's general fund, in part for legal fees incurred by Oregon's public process and land use laws. The Oregon public has more of a right than ever to question how their funds are being used. Costly lawsuits are not part of a winning hand. ODAV can not be trusted with further funds, no matter the source, until it proves less reckless with it's budget. Why would the Airport plan, as it exists today, deserve more than maintenance funds?

Another element of this fiasco is addressing ODAV's role in Oregon state aviation. Its public service and safety missions appear grounded by its advocacy role promoting aviation. They don't seem compatible. Aurora's entangled master plan process has revealed that it's time to investigate whether this agency's purpose has crash-landed, and needs to be rebuilt as a public service agency whose primary responsibility is for aviation safety, not aviation growth. Maybe the agency needs to return as a division of ODOT, where it can receive more public accountability.

Aurora State Airport's master plan has been a boondoggle from the start. Airport advocates are few, and are there for their own financial interests. It's about development ambitions not flight safety. It's about a handful of elite individuals, some of whom are not Oregon residents, gaming the system for their own economic benefit, not what it brings to the region. Public benefits are disproportionately below its costs. Expansion advocates long ago lost legitimacy, both in the courts of law and public opinion. Surrounding communities overwhelmingly disapprove of the plan, and will continue their opposition as long as this plan is alive. The community appreciates and respects the civil air patrol and emergency response roles at the airport, that are not compromised by denying the preferred alternative Airport Master Plan.

ODAV enabled the current C-II designation in the first place, by permitting greater non-compliant use of the airport by larger aircraft. It makes sense to find another home for these planes at one of the five underutilized regional airports, all within 24 nautical miles of Aurora Airport, that are fully equipped and designated to handle those aircraft. Both Salem and McMinnville airports have dual, asphalt runways, with their longest exceeding 5,400 feet, instrument landing systems, fire suppression, and full service facilities. Utilizing a neighboring airport conforming to FAA standards is surely a better, more cost effective solution than spending tens of millions on a constrained airport that the community is adamantly opposed to, and is used by few aircraft over 30,000 pounds. Proper due diligence would include an assessment of regional airports as an alternative to expanding Aurora State Airport. Failure to do so is a dereliction of oversight, to the point of negligence.

Data shows B-II to be the proper designation for this general aviation airport where over 90% of operations are aircraft under 15,000 pounds. A plan based on this will easily conform to FAA standards without costly improvements, purchasing private or public land, inviting even more community resistance, and incurring costly law suits, further delaying conformance to standards.

ODAV has made no inroads in the course of all this. No friends. No credibility. No trust. Our communities have suffered through all these years of tension about its future. The flying public and users of Oregon's airports deserve better. ODAV could use a win, too.

It's time to move on from this boondoggle, reset the mission, and provide well maintained, safe airports instead of empire building at a corner of Marion County in a reckless crusade. The city of Salem, itself within Marion County, is home to an up-to-date airport that has 751 acres with asphalt cross runways, roomy taxi ways, excellent facilities, useful service roads, lots of real estate, and easy freeway access. What more could you want? And ODAV doesn't have, nor need to spend tens of millions on a constrained site. Its scarce resources can be better spent on repairing crumbled runways, upgrading worn facilities, and increasing safety at the state's other 27 owned airports.

Pursuing the Airport Master Plan for an airstrip at a constrained site is fiercely opposed by community stakeholders. We believe that the aircraft-ready airports of McMinnville Municipal and Salem-Willamette Valley deserve to be considered by ODAV. And further, we believe the inevitable, common sense conclusion of meeting standards will be a size and designation for a general aviation airport that truly serves public, not elite, nor out-of-state interests.

Respectfully yours,

*Dave*

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