

# Residents gripe about noise; corporate jets raise revenue

**A**URORA — When Jim Wilson and his wife moved to their farm near the eastern edge of the Aurora State Airport in April 1964, the only traffic on the runway was caused by drag-racing teen-agers, he said.

Now, he watches recreational planes, helicopters and corporate jets take off daily. Most of the activity is between 6 a.m. and 9 p.m., Wilson said.

Since it was established in 1943, the addition of a taxiway and runway lights are among its most significant changes. There is no control tower, and some residents of neighboring Aurora want it to stay that way. But in the past 10 years, air traffic has steadily increased, according to state documents.

Wilson and others want to keep the state from drafting a master plan for the airport, which they say will lead to airport expansion. State aeronautics officials say it is just a status report.

The dispute is nothing new.

Between 1993 and 1995, a group of Aurora residents prevented the state from closing a county road and extending a taxiway into a nearby filbert orchard, said Jack Murray, a resident involved in the dispute and opposed to airport development.

Betsy Johnson, who recently resigned as state director of aeronautics, was new to the job in August 1993.

Johnson is a pilot and member of the Oregon Pilot's Association. She's an honorary member of the Columbia Aviation Association. She also is a founding member of 1000 Friends of Oregon, a land-use planning advocacy group, and serves on its board.

She said the two sides negotiated a resolution to the dispute on the runway plan.

In the end, the state gained one-tenth of an acre for the taxiway and expanded it on state land from 4,104 feet to 5,000 feet. The road remained open, Murray said. The residents spent \$54,000 in legal fees.

Last month, Wilson saw a passenger plane capable of carrying "at least 20 people." He wrote down the registration number and planned to report it to state aeronautics officials. He claimed it is too big for the runway.

Aircraft permitted to land at the airport are generally restricted to less than 45,000 pounds, but exceptions are allowed. The 5,000-foot runway also limits the length of planes that can land.

Many jets fit under the weight requirement, said Ann Crook, air-

## Noise: Fees could pay for on-site manager

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port manager for the state. In the case of jets heavier than 45,000 pounds, the state can conduct an engineering analysis and determine whether the runway will withstand the weight.

Because there is no on-site manager, business owners and residents call Crook to report airport activity and misuse.

Fee increases suggested in a master plan the state is developing would be assessed against airport and fuel users to generate more money in the airport's operating budget. That money could be used to hire an on-site manager — something Crook wants to do.

While pilots are unhappy about the proposed fee increases, residents are unhappy about the noise the aircraft make. Some residents called Crook last spring to complain about the Gulf Stream jet owned by Mark Wattles, chief executive officer of Hollywood Entertainment.

He is one of several executives from corporations such as Fred Meyer, Nike and Coca-Cola who use the airport for business travel, Crook said. Despite the public's perception that jets are louder than other planes, several mechanics and pilots who use the airport say the older aircraft, such as the Russian MiG based there, cause more noise.

Although Crook said she and Johnson told Wattles of numerous complaints, he said he hadn't heard about the noise problems. He said Johnson called and told him the state was considering long-range goals for the airport.

Wattles said he thinks residents near the airport are not receptive to corporate jets. He said he will use the Hillsboro Airport, where his plane is based, until there is a plan that supports corporate flights at Aurora.

An engineering analysis of the jet and runway determined that Wattles' plane could land at Aurora "a couple of times a month for 20 years and not damage the pavement," Crook said.

### Proximity a factor

Wattles said he flies about 400 hours a year and that other executives fly in for meetings at Hollywood Entertainment's headquarters in Wilsonville.

One of the reasons he located the company there is because of its proximity to the airport. The runway easily accommodates his jet, which seats about a dozen people, he said.



WATTLES

Corporate flights are a source of revenue for businesses such as Aurora Aviation owned by Bruce Bennett. More than 10 companies are located on pri-

vately owned commercial property around the runway.

Aurora Aviation, established in 1968, is a full-service aviation company offering flight lessons, charter flights and aviation maintenance. Bennett recently added a fleet of four rental cars for people on temporary business.

The state has no control over the property around the runway. Bennett once owned 25 acres and sold all but the one to developers who built hangars and to the Columbia Aviation Association for its clubhouse.

Twenty-three acres of private land on the southeast corner of the runway are for sale.

"Business would increase but there is more than money in my life. There is the lifestyle. People ride bikes around here and you see them walking on the runway. It's a personable airport. It's not a huge concrete piece. I don't ever want to see it be like PDX or Hillsboro," Bennett said.

He supports a runway extension to 6,000 feet and the addition of tie-down space, called aprons, to park more planes. But that's all, he said.

The master plan could include paving space between the runway and the edge of the property for aprons. It hasn't been determined how much land would be used, Crook said.

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