

## **Appendix B. Planning Timeline for a Southern Nevada Regional Heliport**



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### **B.1 Introduction**

The Clark County Department of Aviation (CCDOA) has led the planning process for the potential development of a non-urban heliport in the southern region of the State of Nevada. The development of a Southern Nevada Regional Heliport (the Heliport) is intended to support the tourism industry in the region by meeting demand for an existing tourist service – air tours by helicopter of the Grand Canyon – in a manner that minimizes the adverse effects of helicopter overflights in the urban areas of the Las Vegas region and Southern Nevada. The planning process involved multiple physical and operational studies and meetings with stakeholders and the public conducted between late-2000 and late-2006. This collection of Planning Studies provides documentation of the various analyses and serves as a source of reference for the subsequent environmental review process.

The goal of the planning process was to establish the preferred location, size, and configuration of the Heliport that would meet multiple objectives: (a) accommodate the forecast Grand Canyon helicopter air tour demand, (b) promote the voluntary relocation of helicopter air tour activity from McCarran International Airport and other potential urban heliport facilities, and (c) allow for flight corridors that minimize overflights of residential areas. The intermediate steps of the planning process consisted of researching physical requirements and operational practices, analyzing existing and future air tour demand, considering and evaluating alternative sites and configurations, determining alternative flight corridors, and establishing initial development standards. The Heliport has been planned and will continue to be developed in coordination with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), the helicopter air tour operators, the Helicopter Association International, and the community.

### **B.2 Planning Process Timeline**

1995 – Due to the increase in helicopter operations at and around McCarran International Airport, flight corridors for helicopter air tours of the Grand Canyon (departing along Tropicana, returning along the Charleston area) were formally established by the FAA through Letters of Agreement with the helicopter air tour operators. The flight corridors were developed to lessen the impact to traffic operating at McCarran International Airport and for safety concerns.

April 1997 – A rise in community concerns along the Tropicana departure flight corridor increased in response to an increase in helicopter tour flights.<sup>1</sup>

August 1997 (and ongoing) – Through an informal Helicopter Users Forum whose participants include the tour operators, the FAA Air Traffic Control, the FAA Flight Standards District Office, and other interest parties, Clark County has and continues to work with the FAA and operators to improve compliance along preferred corridors, and, where possible and appropriate, revised the procedures to increase flight altitudes and/or reduce direct overflights of residential areas.

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<sup>1</sup> Historical helicopter operations are not available for this timeframe; noise monitoring has been conducted annually at McCarran since 2000.

December 2000 – CCDOA completed its initial helicopter noise assessment, which included noise monitoring (conducted over a two-week period) and noise modeling of a “busy day”. Results showed that helicopter operations did not generate significant noise exposure over noise sensitive land uses, according to 14 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 150 – defined as day-night annual average sound level of 65 decibels, A-weighted (DNL 65) and higher. Noise monitoring has been conducted annually since 2000.

March/April 2001 – The CCDOA, in conjunction with Clark County Commissioner Williams, held a series of neighborhood meetings to (1) address the County and State limits of controlling/reducing helicopter noise impacts, and (2) to share the results of the helicopter noise assessment completed in 2000. The development of a non-urban heliport was identified as a potential solution, if the heliport would be utilized by air tour operators. A subsequent meeting was also held in May 2005 to provide updated information to the community.

May 2001 – The Helicopter User’s Forum considered a variety of alternative routing options, and discussed the possibility of a non-urban heliport. Although a number of other helicopter flight corridors were explored, and some tested by the operators or the Metropolitan Police Department, alternative flight corridors through the urbanized areas of the Las Vegas region were not implemented due to safety considerations (impact on fixed-wing aircraft traffic patterns), community impact concerns (transferring noise issues from one community to another), or operator refusal to use the flight corridors (increased flight time and fuel consumption demands).

May and December 2001 – The Nevada State Legislature adopted Assembly Bill 490, amending Nevada Revised Statute Chapter 244 (NRS 244) to authorize certain counties, including Clark County, to create an advisory committee on aircraft noise. The purposes of the committee created under this authority were to examine information related to the problems of aircraft noise, promote increased communication, and consult with relevant public agencies. The Clark County Board of County Commissioners (the Board) adopted an ordinance pursuant to NRS 244 that established an Advisory Committee on Helicopter Noise (ACHN), facilitated by CCDOA, through which various parties would be able to discuss, review, and, where appropriate, formulate potential solutions to helicopter noise concerns. The ordinance provided for the appointment of 10 members to the committee: seven members who represent neighborhoods directly affected by helicopter overflights, two members who represent commercial operators of helicopters, and one member who represents the Board.

The ACHN met regularly on an annual basis and discussed strategies to reduce helicopter noise over noise sensitive land uses in the Las Vegas region. In February 2007, the ACHN was disbanded because it was found that all possible legal remedies to reduce helicopter noise impacts have been pursued by Clark County, and that the relocation of the helicopter air tour operators to a non-urban heliport was the best solution to address ongoing helicopter noise in the urban environment.

March 2002 – The CCDOA pursued Congressional support to acquire 160 acres near Railroad Pass, located in Henderson, Nevada, for a non-urban heliport. The site was located near another heliport being proposed within the area by a helicopter air tour operator. Due to opposition from the City of Henderson, the public lands release request for the Railroad Pass site was

not supported by the Nevada Legislative delegation, and the pursuit of the proposed private heliport facility within the area was abandoned.

September 2002 – The ACHN passed an Action Item requesting that the Board relocate the base of tourist helicopters. This recommendation was presented to the Board in June 2003 during the ACHN’s presentation of their 2002 Annual Report.

June 2003 – The Nevada State Legislature adopted Assembly Bill 355, amending Nevada Revised Statutes Chapter 495 Sections 300-320 (NRS 495) to require certain counties, including Clark County, to designate a preferred non-urban heliport site by early 2004. The statute required that the selected heliport site not be located at the largest airport in the County (e.g., McCarran International Airport) and that it not be located in a residential area. The Legislature adopted AB 355 after multiple hearings in the Assembly and Senate in April and May 2003, which focused principally on the issue of helicopter noise in Clark County.

November 2003 – The *Needs Assessment* was completed, documenting the physical and operational characteristics of commercial helicopter operators in Southern Nevada, and identified generalized facility and area requirements for a non-urban heliport that would accommodate multiple commercial helicopter operators.

December 2003 – The *Site Suitability Assessment* was completed, assessing the suitability of 13 candidate heliport sites to accommodate the heliport requirements identified in the *Needs Assessment*. One site, identified as the GoKart/Sloan site, was recommended as the most suitable for the Southern Nevada Regional Heliport.

January 2004 – The CCDOA attended a meeting with the Anthem home owners association regarding the *Site Suitability Assessment* findings and GoKart/Sloan site selection.

January 2004 – The ACHN passed an Action Item requesting that the Board designate the GoKart/Sloan site, as identified in the *Site Suitability Assessment*, as the preferred facility for the takeoff and landing of commercial helicopters serving the Grand Canyon air tour market.

January 2004 – The CCDOA hosted a public workshop regarding the *Site Suitability Assessment*, and the heliport site selection, as required by NRS 495. Over 400 public comments were received regarding the selection process.

February 2004 – The Board hosted a public hearing regarding the designation of a preferred non-urban heliport site, as required by NRS 495. Considering the completed *Needs Assessment* and *Site Suitability Assessment* studies, the written comments and public input received on the *Site Suitability Assessment* and related public workshop, and the testimony given by residents, helicopter tour operators, the ACHN, and CCDOA staff during the public hearing, the Board directed that one additional alternative site be considered and, if it were found to meet the established requirements, it would be designated as the preferred non-urban heliport site. The site was to be located about two to five miles south of the Sloan and Interstate 15 interchange, south of the Las Vegas Valley. The GoKart/Sloan site, recommended as the site suitable to support a non-urban heliport facility, as identified in the *Site Suitability Assessment*, was retained as the preferred backup site should land acquisition of the preferred site be delayed.

The site was eventually referred to as the South of Sloan site. The actual parcel was selected during a site visit that included CCDOA and three Grand Canyon helicopter air tour operators. The site appeared upon initial review to be able to accommodate development and operation of a heliport; however, use of the site was subject to confirmation of its technical suitability and transfer of ownership of the land. Technical suitability was confirmed by the evaluation of the site using the criteria established in the *Site Suitability Assessment*, as documented in the *Supplemental Site Suitability Assessment of the South of Sloan Site*.

February 2004 and November 2005 – The CCDOA pursued Congressional support to acquire a 229-acre parcel, located about two miles south of the GoKart/Sloan site, in Clark County, Nevada, for a non-urban heliport. The site was located east of Interstate 15, managed by the Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management, and surrounded by vacant and undeveloped land. Congressional action was needed to transfer ownership of the parcel because the land was located outside an area approved for disposal.

In May 2004, Nevada's Congressional delegation assisted with land requirements by introducing draft legislation authorizing the transfer of land from federal ownership to Clark County ownership specifically for development of a heliport. Legislation was enacted on November 30, 2005,<sup>2</sup> to allow transfer of the land to Clark County as soon as practicable, and to establish ownership and operating conditions. The ownership and operating conditions include:

- The County shall not dispose of the parcel.
- The parcel shall be used for operation of a heliport facility. If the County ceases to use the site for heliport operations, the parcel shall revert to federal ownership.
- The operator of any for-profit helicopter tour originating from or terminating at the site that crosses the Sloan Canyon National Conservation Area (NCA) (a) shall pay a conservation fee, (b) except for safety reasons, shall not fly outside a specific 2-mile path when inside the boundaries of the Sloan Canyon NCA, and (c) except for safety reasons, shall not fly below specific heights above the ground when crossing the boundaries of the Sloan Canyon NCA.

July 2004 – The CCDOA hosted an Open House regarding the Board site designation in the Seven Hills master planned community, located in Henderson, Nevada.

Summer 2005 – CCDOA completed a *Helicopter Fly Safely and Quietly* brochure.

December 2006 – The Project Definition, Development, and Operational Manual (PDDOM) were completed. The first part of the PDDOM, the Project Definition Manual, was developed to:

- Establish Department of Aviation goals for development and operation of the Heliport to guide the development of updated facility requirements, conceptual site design, subsequent architectural/engineering design, and eventual construction stages.
- Update the facility requirements for the Heliport based on current and projected operator needs, in-progress forecasts of operational activity, and appropriate design standards.
- Develop and evaluate multiple layout alternatives for the South of Sloan site, and select the Recommended Plan for further refinement.

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<sup>2</sup> *Transportation, Treasury, Housing and Urban Development, The Judiciary, The District of Columbia, and Independent Agencies Appropriations Act of 2006*, Pub. L. 109-115, 119 Stat. 2429, Section 180 (2005).

- Refine the requirements and development standards for the Heliport based on the Recommended Plan.

The second part of the PDDOM, the Heliport Development Standards, was developed to provide general guidelines for Clark County and lessees to use in the design and construction of their respective portions of the Heliport.

The third part of the PDDOM, the Preliminary Operations Supplement, was developed to establish operational and safety considerations for the Heliport.

January 2007 – As provided in the PDDOM, the Conceptual Heliport Layout Plan (HLP) was submitted to the FAA for preliminary review, and remains subject to further revision.

February 2007 – The FAA formally approved the *Forecasts of Grand Canyon Helicopter Air Tour Operations and Passengers*. Additionally, the FAA formally approved the South of Sloan heliport site to be included in the National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS).

April 2007 – The *Supplemental Site Suitability Assessment for the South of Sloan Site* was completed for the CCDOA, assessing the candidate heliport site added by the Board, to accommodate the heliport requirements identified in the *Needs Assessment*.