

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION  
FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION  
NORTHWEST MOUNTAIN REGION

RECORD OF DECISION

FOR A  
PROPOSED REPLACEMENT AIRPORT AT  
ST. GEORGE, UTAH  
WASHINGTON COUNTY, UTAH

January 30, 2001

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## **I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

In 1995, the City of St. George, Utah selected a consultant to prepare an Airport Site Selection Study, Master Plan, and Environmental Assessment (EA) for a replacement airport. As discussed in these now-completed documents, the purpose of this proposed capital investment project is to provide replacement facilities to accommodate existing and anticipated demand by business and general aviation users in the area and meet Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) design standards. The objective of the City of St. George is to provide an airport that will meet FAA standards and accommodate, in a safe and efficient manner, forecast demand for passenger enplanements. This translates to an airport with an initial runway length of 8,000 feet capable of being expanded in the future to a length of 9,300 feet. The 9,300 foot runway length would accommodate approximately 75% of the fleet at 90% useful load and have the ability to provide for a precision approach to runway 22 and non-precision Global Positioning System (GPS) approach to runway 4. The airport Master Plan forecast that passenger jets may eventually serve the City of St. George and that there will be additional commercial aviation activity at the replacement airport. The Final Environmental Assessment (FEA) uses the aviation forecast data contained in the airport Master Plan.

In 1995, at the request of the City of St. George and with the support of the Utah Department of Transportation Aeronautics Division, the FAA began its involvement with these studies. The Master Plan Site Selection Study, identified 15 possible airport sites that were potentially adequate for this proposed airport development. From these 15 sites, six potential airport locations were identified for initial analysis. Three of these six sites were evaluated more thoroughly. On July 7, 1998, the St. George City Council identified a preferred alternative site after considering community, operational, financial and environmental issues. The No Action and preferred alternatives were evaluated in depth in the FEA. The existing site, due to topography, can not be expanded or modified to meet forecast conditions or to meet runway safety area standards. The preferred alternative site is located approximately five road miles southeast of St. George City proper and is situated on lands presently within Washington County, and within St. George City and Washington City limits. This site is primarily undeveloped and would not require the displacement of any residences.

On June 16, 2000, a draft EA was released for a 45-day public comment period. A public hearing on the draft EA was held in St. George on July 18, 2000. Comments on the draft EA reflected a concern for several environmentally related issues, with a primary focus on potential environmental impacts of the project upon Zion National Park, 26 miles distant from the preferred alternative, and upon the community of Washington City which is adjacent to the preferred alternative site.

The FEA was approved and signed by the FAA on January 30, 2001. The FEA addresses each area of public and agency concern, through modifications to the text of the draft EA, and/or by specific responses to written comments submitted during the public comment period.

## **II. THE PROPOSED AGENCY ACTIONS AND APPROVALS**

FAA actions, determinations, and approvals necessary for this project to proceed to completion include the following:

a. A determination of project eligibility for Federal grant-in-aid funds (49 U.S.C. § 47101, et. Seq.) and Passenger Facility Charge [PFC] funds (49 U.S.C. § 40117) for land acquisition and relocation (49 CFR Part 24), site preparation, runway, taxiway, runway safety area, and other airfield construction, terminal and related landside development, navigational and landing aids, and environmental mitigation.

b. A determination of agency support for the development of a precision approach to runway 22 and non-precision Global Positioning System (GPS) approach to runway 4 at the replacement airport, along with the development and publication of air traffic control procedures associated with the use of the GPS procedures [49 U.S.C. § 40103(b)].

c. Determinations, through the aeronautical study process, under 14 CFR Part 77, regarding obstructions to navigable airspace (49 U.S.C. § 40103(b) and 40113).

d. Determinations under 14 CFR Part 157 as to whether or not the agency objects to the proposed airport development proposal from an airspace perspective based upon aeronautical studies [49 U.S.C. § 40113(a)].

e. Determinations under 49 U.S.C. Sections 47106 and 47107 pertaining to FAA funding of airport development, including approval of a revised Airport Layout Plan (ALP), 49 U.S.C. § 47107(a)(16), environmental approval (see 42 U.S.C. §§ 4321-4347, and 40 CFR § 1500-1508), and determinations under other statutes discussed in this Record of Decision (ROD).

f. An agency certification that the proposed facility is reasonably necessary for use in air commerce or for the national defense (see 49 U.S.C. § 44502(b)).

### III. ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS

As noted above, in determining a preferred project location, the FAA reviewed the site selection analysis that was completed in 1997. This information is contained in The Airport Site Selection and Master Plan Study. The purpose of the study was to identify a preferred airport site that would address environmental and operational concerns. During the development of the Airport Site Selection and Master Plan Study and Environmental assessment, a technical coordination and public involvement process was conducted that regularly presented study findings and sought technical and public input in decisions. Public and agency involvement in the development, evaluation and selection of alternatives was extensive. Details of alternatives analysis included in the environmental process are included in the Airport Site Selection and Master Plan Study and the FEA documents. The FAA determined that the assumptions and methodology used, and the conclusions reached by the airport sponsor in that study were appropriate.

The following is a summary description of the alternatives evaluated:

**Take No Action.** This alternative assumed that there would be no replacement airport at St. George, Utah.

**Construct Airport at Site 1** The site is located approximately 5 road miles southeast of St. George City and is situated on lands presently within the Washington County, St. George City, and Washington City limits. This site encompasses approximately 1,158 acres.

**Construct Airport at Site 1A** This site is situated approximately 2,000 feet south of the Site 1 runway. The site encompasses approximately 1087 acres.

**Construct Airport at Site 2** This site is located approximately 6 road miles south of St. George City proper. It is located entirely within the city limits of St. George on lands owned by the Utah State School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration. The site encompasses approximately 1,300 acres. Two endangered plant species were found on this site, the Dwarf-Bear Poppy and the Homgren Milkvetch.

**Construct an Airport on the Preferred Site (Combination of site 1 and 1A).** This alternative is identified as the preferred alternative in the FEA. It is a combination of Site 1 and 1A. The site is located approximately 5 miles southeast of the City of St. George and approximately 26 miles from Zion National Park. The site encompasses 1458 acres. The initial runway will be constructed to 100 feet wide by 8,000 feet long. The runway can be expanded to 150 feet wide by 9,300 feet long if the need develops in the future. Although beyond the 20-year planning projection, the site could potentially accommodate an 11,500 foot long runway. If in the future this potential lengthening is considered necessary, a new environmental assessment would be

prepared to evaluate potential environmental impacts. Other design features include runway lighting, apron and terminal areas, an access road, and a planned nonprecision GPS approach.

The primary considerations for the FAA in the selection of an alternative for Federal support include: the purpose and need for the project, airspace considerations, and environmental impacts.

In its consideration of alternatives, the FAA has also been mindful of its statutory charter to encourage the development of civil aeronautics and safety of air commerce in the United States (49 U.S.C. 40104).

After careful consideration of the analysis of the impacts of the alternatives considered, and of the ability of these alternatives to satisfy the identified purpose and need for the proposed facility; and after review and consideration of the testimony at the public hearing, of comments submitted in response to the EA and of coordination with federal, state, and local agencies; and after considering Federal policy, the FAA hereby selects the preferred alternative (combination of site 1 and 1A) in the FEA, for Federal support.

#### **IV. THE AGENCY FINDINGS**

The FAA makes the following determinations for this project, based upon appropriate information and analysis set forth in the FEA and other portions of the administrative record.

A. The project is consistent with existing plans of public agencies for development of the area surrounding the airport. [49 U.S.C. 47106(a)(1)].

The determination prescribed by this statutory provision is a precondition to agency approval of project grant funding applications. Coordination regarding this proposed project has taken place between Federal, State and local agencies. See Monty Yeager, Utah Department of Transportation, Aeronautics Division, July 18, 2000, public hearing testimony (transcript at pages 84-87) for a statement of support for the St. George replacement airport. The replacement airport is also included in the FAA's 10-year National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS) and the 5-year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). The NPIAS and CIP have been coordinated with and adopted by the Utah Department of Transportation, Aeronautics Division. The replacement airport is endorsed in the Coordination Plan for Washington County's Urbanizing Region, an Element of The Washington County General Plan, (July 1997, pages 27, 41, and Land Use Plan diagram).

B. The interests of the community in or near which the project may be located have been given fair consideration. [49 U.S.C. 47106(b)(2)]

The determination prescribed by this statutory provision is a precondition to agency approval of airport development project grant funding applications. The FEA demonstrates that the proposed new airport will not disrupt or divide the community nor impede its orderly development, and it is not in conflict with the comprehensive planning and goals of Washington County and the City of St. George, Utah. This is shown in FEA Chapter 4, Section 4.2, Compatible Land Use and Section 4.4 Induced Socioeconomic Impacts. Also see, Appendix J, Comments and Responses to Public Hearing. The draft EA was provided to the public and governmental agencies for review and comment. Furthermore, a public hearing was held on July 18, 2000, to provide an additional opportunity for persons to comment on the proposed development.

C. The State of Utah has certified in writing that there is reasonable assurance that the project will be located, designed, constructed, and operated in compliance with applicable air and water quality standards [49 U.S.C. § 47106 (c)(1)(B)].

The determination prescribed by this statutory provision is a precondition to agency funding approval of airport development project funding applications involving the construction of the replacement airport. See October 28, 1999 letter from the Governor in Appendix A of the FEA at page A-49, addressing the above-required certification.

D. Appropriate action, including the adoption of zoning laws, has been or will be taken to the extent reasonable to restrict the use of land next to or near the airport to uses that are compatible with normal airport operations. [49 U.S.C. § 47107(a)(10)].

The sponsor assurance prescribed by this statutory provision is a precondition to agency approval of airport development project funding applications. The zoning plans for the replacement airport are addressed in the Site Selection and Master Plan document. Also, see April 6, 2000, Resolution from St. George City, in Appendix A of the FEA at page A-55, and Resolution 751 by Washington County dated April 10, 2000, in Appendix A of the FEA at page A- 56 addressing the above issue.

E. "Use" of publicly owned land of a public park, recreation area, or wildlife and waterfowl refuge of national, State, or local significance or land of an historic site of national, State or local significance (formerly DOT Section 4(f), recodified at 49 USC, Section 303).

Section 4(f) requires the FAA to determine whether the proposed action would "use" publicly owned land of a public park, recreation area, or wildlife or waterfowl refuge of national, state, or local significance; or land (either publicly owned or privately owned) of a historic site of national, state, or local significance. A transportation "use" can occur in two ways: (1) an actual direct physical taking of property for a transportation project, such as to construct an airport on the property, or (2) a "constructive" use, where a transportation project does not directly use the property, but does impact it so adversely that it effectively uses it by substantially diminishing its activities, features, or attributes. Constructive use would result when the environmental impacts caused by the transportation project are so severe that the utility of the Section 4(f) resource in terms of its prior significance is substantially diminished or destroyed.

From the sound analysis presented in the FEA, the FAA finds that there would be a negligible change in sound impacts at points inside Zion National Park resulting from construction and operation of the preferred alternative.

The FAA has therefore determined there would be a negligible change in sound impacts upon Section 4(f) lands and therefore no constructive use of those lands.

F. Finding of No Significant Environmental Impact (40 CFR 1508.13)

After careful and thorough consideration of the discussions set forth in the FEA and in this Record of Decision, it is found that the proposed Federal action [Combination of site 1 and 1A, the preferred alternative] is consistent with existing national environmental policies and objectives as set forth in section 101(a) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 [NEPA], and that it will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment or otherwise include any condition requiring consultation pursuant to section 102 (2) (C) of

NEPA.

## V. MITIGATION

The FEA has shown there are no significant environmental impacts to be mitigated. However, the FAA is prepared to work with the airport owner to educate pilots in visual flight rule conditions about avoiding flight over Zion National Park. The FAA will also work with the National Park Service to participate in a Utah airport managers meeting to outline National Park policies and concerns about aviation overflights.

## VI. DECISION AND ORDER

For the reasons summarized earlier in this ROD, and supported by detailed discussion in the FEA, the FAA has determined that the preferred alternative is an environmentally acceptable alternative.

Having made this determination, the two remaining decision choices available for the FAA are to approve the agency actions necessary for the project's implementation, or to not approve them. Approval would signify that applicable Federal requirements relating to airport development planning have been met, and would permit the City of St. George to proceed with the proposed development and receive Federal funds and/or PFC approvals for eligible items of development. Not approving these agency actions would prevent the City of St. George from proceeding with Federally supported development in a timely manner.

I have carefully considered the FAA's goals and objectives in relation to various aeronautical aspects of the proposed project discussed in the FEA, including the purposes and needs to be served by the project, the alternative means of achieving them, the environmental impacts of these alternatives, the mitigation necessary to preserve and enhance the environment, and the costs and benefits of achieving these purposes and needs in terms of effective and fiscally responsible expenditure of Federal funds.

Based upon the administrative record of this project, I make the certification prescribed by 49 U.S.C. § 44502(b), that implementation of the preferred alternative approved in this ROD is reasonably necessary for use in air commerce.

Therefore, under the authority delegated to me by the Administrator of the FAA, I find that this project is reasonably supported, and I therefore direct that action be taken to carry out the agency actions discussed more fully in Section II of this Record.

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Lawrence B. Andriesen  
Regional Administrator,  
Northwest Mountain Region

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## RIGHT OF APPEAL

This decision constitutes the Federal approval for the actions identified above and any subsequent actions approving a grant of Federal Funds and/or PFC approvals to the City of St. George. Today's action is taken pursuant to 49 U.S.C. Subtitle VII, Parts A and B, and constitutes a Final Order of the Administrator, subject to review by the Courts of Appeals of the United States in accordance with the provisions of 49 U.S.C. § 46110.