

June 20, 2007

  
Palm Beach International Airport  
GATEWAY TO

*the Best of Everything!*

Commissioner Jeff Koons, Chair and Board Members of the  
Palm Beach County Metropolitan Planning Organization

**Re: Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)**

Dear Commissioner Koons and MPO Board Members:

During the past week, each of the Board Members of the Palm Beach County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) received a letter from the City of West Palm Beach expressing concerns about the investment of State financial resources to improve aviation facilities in Palm Beach County, in particular, the proposed extension of Runway 9R-27L at Palm Beach International Airport (PBIA).

The State of Florida's funding of aviation projects is largely comprised of proceeds from an aviation fuel tax fund, of which Palm Beach County airport users are significant contributors. The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) you will be addressing on June 21, 2007 includes eighteen (18) separate projects for the four airports owned and operated by the Palm Beach County Board of County Commissioners. Of these eighteen projects, only three are specifically for the proposed extension of Runway 9R-27L at PBIA. All eighteen projects are included in the current Airport Master Plans, which have been reviewed and accepted by the Board of County Commissioners, the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). As with many other projects found in the TIP, final environmental approvals have not yet been obtained for all of the projects in the program. One of the three projects associated with the proposed extension of Runway 9R-27L is, in fact, for the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) currently underway with the FAA. The FAA is the lead agency for the environmental approval of the project; without their approval, the project will not be initiated. At the present time, we anticipate receiving final environmental approval in early 2009. It is not until 2011 and 2012 that design and construction funding are programmed for the proposed runway extension. It is not uncommon for an airport owner/sponsor to proceed with the programming of funding for the project concurrent with the FAA's environmental analysis, recognizing that such funds cannot be awarded or utilized on the project until the Record of Decision (ROD) relative to the EIS is issued by the FAA. Approving projects in the TIP out-years is not an irrevocable commitment of funding; should future planning and/or environmental review identify an alternative action that meets the needs of the County, those funds can be reprogrammed. However, if the County waits until all environmental approvals are obtained prior to programming funds, the project would be unnecessarily delayed.

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West Palm Beach, FL 33406-1470  
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[www.pbia.org](http://www.pbia.org)

PALM BEACH COUNTY GLADES AIRPORT  
Pahokee

PALM BEACH COUNTY PARK AIRPORT  
Lantana

NORTH COUNTY GENERAL AVIATION AIRPORT  
Palm Beach Gardens

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In the letter, the City of West Palm Beach questioned the need for the project. The Department's forecast of aviation activity, approved by the FAA in February 2006, is consistent with the FAA's Terminal Area Forecast (TAF) for PBIA. Additionally, in May 2007, the FAA released a report titled "Capacity Needs in the National Airspace System" which calls out Palm Beach International as an airport needing additional capacity by 2015. While aircraft operations at PBIA are forecast to increase at a modest rate of 1.5% annually through 2025, PBIA has already reached the point where a modest increase in operations overwhelms the existing airfield infrastructure during peak periods.

Although aviation forecasts are often presented in annual operations levels, more useful metrics used for determining runway capacity deficiencies are peak month average day (PMAD) operations and hourly airfield capacity. The existing airfield can accommodate approximately 65 aircraft operations per hour, while the proposed airfield will increase the airfield capacity to approximately 112 operations per hour. The driving factor behind the proposed runway extension is not only the volume of aircraft activity anticipated, but also the types of aircraft utilizing the Airport, their runway and operational requirements, and the policies issued by the FAA within the past 10 years that restrict the operations on intersecting runways.

The City of West Palm Beach also expressed concerns about the negative impacts of the proposed project on the residents and businesses in the City, as well as the socioeconomic and fiscal impacts of the project. The FAA, through the EIS process, will evaluate the impacts of the County's proposed project on a variety of resource areas, including but not limited to air quality, noise, compatible land use, socioeconomic impacts and environmental justice, and historical, architectural, archaeological and cultural resources.

Additionally, it was recommended that the County initiate a comprehensive County-wide airport capacity management plan and encourage the use of other airports by providing Customs and Immigration facilities at those airports. The County does in fact manage a system of airports within the boundaries of the County, with each airport meeting various needs within the system – Palm Beach International, North Palm Beach County General Aviation Airport, Palm Beach County Park Airport and Palm Beach County Glades Airport. In 1994, the County constructed the North Palm Beach County General Aviation Airport as a reliever airport to Palm Beach International Airport; the airport has developed into one of the premier general aviation facilities in the State and currently serves over 200 based aircraft. Palm Beach County Park Airport, also known as Lantana Airport, serves the general aviation needs of the south-central portion of the County with more than 350 based aircraft. Glades Airport, or Pahokee Airport, presently serves the needs of the agricultural community in the Glades, as well as a variety of skydiving and other sport-aircraft operators.