

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

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
AND
RECORD OF DECISION

FOR PROPOSED
AIRPORT IMPROVEMENTS AT
JACKSON HOLE AIRPORT
JACKSON, WYOMING

February 8, 1999

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I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In 1992, the Jackson Hole Airport Board (Airport Board) began a public process which has provided a basis for taking the Federal actions described in this Record of Decision (ROD). From 1992 through 1994, the Airport Board held a number of public meetings, workshops, and hearings designed to determine the scope and content of an Environmental Assessment (EA) to be prepared for the Jackson Hole Master Plan Update. The Master Plan Update addressed a number of proposed airport improvements, several of which have proved to be very controversial. This controversy led to a series of modifications to those proposed improvements over the ensuing 6 years, and ultimately led to the safety-related improvements approved in this Record of Decision.

From a Federal Aviation Administrative (FAA) perspective, the development issue of most urgent importance relates to the alarming number of runway excursions at the Jackson Hole Airport in recent years, and the fact that the airport's runway does not currently meet FAA design criteria for runway safety areas (RSA's) at each runway end. The Airport Board's Master Plan Update was designed, in part, to address this development need.

In February 1995, the Airport Board circulated to the public and appropriate agencies a "Preliminary Environmental Assessment," seeking public comment on the selection of a preferred alternative. In September 1995, upon consideration of these comments, the Airport Board released a draft EA, identifying a preferred alternative, which encompassed a number of improvements designed to enhance the safety and efficiency of the airport, including a translation of the runway 1,206 feet to the north, paved stopways on both runway ends, along with various navigational aids (including an airport traffic control tower (ATCT)), terminal and other landside improvements, and noise mitigation and abatement measures.

In April 1997, following additional public meetings and hearings, as well as a formal public comment period, the Airport Board issued a four-volume Final EA, identifying a different preferred alternative. The Airport Board's preferred alternative included a translation of the runway 568 feet to the north, the construction of paved safety areas at both runway ends of the translated runway, along with various navigational aids (including an ATCT), terminal and other landside improvements, and noise mitigation and abatement measures.

In September 1998, following almost 18 months of interagency consultation, the FAA issued its own Federal draft EA, with a 45-day agency and public comment period. The Federal EA focuses exclusively on several alternatives for a limited number of airport improvements directly related to the need to bring the RSA's at the airport into compliance with current FAA design standards. The Federal final EA (FEA) addresses a number of issues of public and agency concern, through modifications to the text of the draft EA, and/or by specific responses to issues raised during the public comment period.

Throughout the Airport Board EA process and the federal EA process, extensive coordination has taken place between the FAA, the Airport Board, the National Park Service (NPS), and interested members of the public, due to expressed environmental concerns and other concerns with the project's proposed alternatives and their impacts. This consultation process continued in a series of teleconferences between the FAA, the Airport Board and the NPS, following the close of the draft EA formal comment period, and resulted in the identification of the preferred alternative discussed in the FEA, which is being signed and issued in February 1999, simultaneously with this ROD. As discussed below, the Federal preferred alternative is a compromise between the alternatives favored by the NPS and the alternative favored by the Airport Board.

II. THE PROPOSED AGENCY ACTIONS AND APPROVALS

The 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.) for site preparation, runway safety area, taxiway, runway rehabilitation, and other minor airfield construction, navigational aid relocation, and environmental mitigation.

b. Agency replacement of a visual approach slope indicator (VASI) with a precision approach path indicator (PAPI) [49 U.S.C. § 44502(a)(1)].

c. Agency's development and publication of new air traffic control airspace procedures associated with the use of the navigational aids and traffic control tower [49 U.S.C. § 40103(b)].

d. Determinations under 49 U.S.C. Sections 47106 and 47107 relating to FAA funding of airport development, environmental

approval (see 42 U.S.C. §§ 4321-4347, and 40 CFR § 1500-1508), and determinations under other statutes discussed in this ROD.

e. 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, the alternatives evaluated in the Federal FEA are much more limited in scope than the alternatives presented in the Airport Board's EA, and do not address all of the noise abatement and mitigation measures, the landside development, or some of the navigational aids proposed by the Airport Board. As explained in the response to comments section of the FEA, the FAA has deferred its consideration of these other proposals to allow immediate focus upon air-side infrastructure at Jackson Hole Airport requiring immediate safety enhancement.

The FEA includes an analysis of several potential alternatives for satisfying the project purpose and need. The following is a summary description of the alternatives evaluated:

a. Alternative 1. Do Nothing. This alternative would maintain the existing substandard RSA and runway object-free area (ROFA) configurations at the airport and would do nothing to address the repeated runway excursions. Thus, it would not satisfy the project purpose and need.

b. Alternative 2. Translate Runway 568 Feet North. As more fully described in Chapter 3 of the FEA, this alternative would translate the runway and associated taxiways 568 feet to the north, provide for standard RSA's, ROFA's, and runway protection zones (RPZ's) on both ends of the runways, and relocate various navigational aids.

c. Alternative 2A. This alternative includes all of the elements of Alternative 2 and adds construction of an ATCT.

Alternatives 2 and 2A have been opposed by the NPS and by some environmental organizations, primarily due to the 568-foot runway translation element of these two alternatives.

d. Alternative 3. Acquire Land for South RSA. As more fully described in Chapter 3 of the FEA, this alternative would

leave the runway at its current length and location, provide for standard RSA's, ROFA's, and RPZ's on both ends of the runways, and relocate various navigational aids. It would require the acquisition of up to 8.6 acres of land at the south end of the runway, and require the relocation of approximately 1,700 feet of Spring Gulch Road and airport fencing.

e. Alternative 3A. This alternative includes all of the elements of Alternative 3 and adds construction of an ATCT.

Alternatives 3 and 3A have been opposed by the Jackson Hole Airport Board and by some citizens in the Jackson Hole community, primarily due to the disruptions which would be caused by the acquisition of up to 8.6 acres of land outside of current airport boundaries.

f. Alternative 4. Translate Runway 300 Feet North. As more fully described at pages 10-11 of the FEA, this, the Federally preferred alternative, would translate the runway and associated taxiways 300 feet to the north; provide for standard RSA's and RPZ's and near-standard ROFA's on both ends of the runways; relocate various navigational aids; and provide for the non-Federal construction of an ATCT. This alternative differs from a similar alternative, described on page 11 of the Federal draft EA (which was rejected therein due to its greater overall environmental impacts and costs), in that it eliminates the need to acquire 8.6 acres of land outside of current airport boundaries. As described in the FEA, a minor modification of FAA ROFA standards now makes this alternative feasible and prudent.

The primary considerations for the FAA in the selection of an alternative for Federal support include: the purpose and need for the project, environmental impacts, impacts to the residential community of Jackson Hole, and impacts to Grand Teton National Park.

Based upon review of public and agency comments received from circulation of the draft environmental assessment, the FAA has worked with the Airport Board and the NPS to further develop Alternative 4 to achieve FAA standard RSA's. The FAA has elected to issue the Airport Board a "modification of standard" for a small portion of the ROFA. This modification of standard, combined with a reduced runway translation, results in no land acquisition and no relocation of Spring Gulch Road. The FAA's configuration of Alternative 4 balances community concerns (no land acquisition, no road relocation, and minimal noise level changes) with park values (minimal noise level changes and

minimal amounts of new pavement through removal of unneeded taxiways). For the reasons above and those to follow, the FAA has selected Alternative 4 as its preferred alternative. The NPS and Teton County have concurred with this determination.

Alternatives 2 and 2a are technically feasible. However, concerns raised by the NPS and several environmental groups regarding the extent of a runway translation to the north, as well as the likelihood of additional delay in constructing important safety improvements during further debate on Alternatives 2 and 2a, have moved the FAA to select Alternative 4, rather than 2 or 2a.

Like Alternatives 2 and 2a, Alternatives 3 and 3a are technically feasible. As a result of this environmental evaluation, the FAA has determined that achieving the standard ROFA at the south end of the runway cannot be accomplished without a great amount of community disruption. Therefore, the FAA has selected Alternative 4, rather than 3 or 3a.

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: (1) the analysis of the impacts of the various alternatives considered, and the ability of these alternatives to satisfy the identified purpose and need for the proposed facility; (2) the review and consideration of the testimony and comments submitted in response to the draft EA at the many public meetings, workshops and hearings; (3) coordination with Federal, state, and local agencies; and (4) consideration of Federal policy, the FAA hereby selects for Federal support the development proposal identified as Alternative 4 in the FEA.

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. Extensive coordination regarding this proposed

project has taken place between Federal, state and local agencies. See the Appendix for a letter from Teton County supporting the preferred alternative.

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 preferred alternative for airport development will not disrupt or divide the community, nor will it impede its orderly development, and it is not in conflict with the comprehensive planning and goals of Teton County and the City of Jackson Hole, Wyoming. See the Appendix for a letter from Teton County supporting the preferred alternative.

c. 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 Airport Board has received Federal financial assistance in past years and has executed the set of grant assurances, including language requiring adoption of appropriate zoning, to protect airport operations.

d. A "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 ROD, it is found that the proposed Federal action (FAA support of development Alternative 4, 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 such development 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

In accordance with 40 CFR 1505.3, the FAA will take appropriate steps, through Federal funding, grant assurances and conditions, airport layout plan approvals, and contract plans and specifications, to ensure that mitigation actions identified in the FEA are implemented during the development of the projects approved within this ROD, and will monitor the implementation of these mitigation actions, as necessary, to assure that representations made in the FEA, with respect to mitigation, are carried out. The FEA, Chapter 6, includes a summary of mitigation actions.

VI. DECISION AND ORDER

Although the "No Action" alternative has fewer developmental impacts than any of the other alternatives, including the preferred alternative, it fails to achieve the purpose and need for this project. 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 the environmentally preferable 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 Jackson Hole Airport Board to proceed with the proposed development and receive Federal funds for eligible items of development. Not approving these agency actions would prevent the Airport Board from proceeding in a timely manner with Federally supported development.

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.

Original Signed by

February 8, 1999

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 to the Jackson Hole Airport Board. 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.

Appendix

State of Wyoming

December 9, 1998

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Commissioners

BOB SHERVIN, Chair
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Mr. Lowell Johnson
Federal Aviation Administration
1601 Lind Avenue, S.W.
Renton, Washington 98055-4056

Dear Mr. Johnson:

The Board of County Commissioners is pleased to respond to the recent information of the FAA's proposal for a 300 foot northern translocation of the runway. It is our understanding this proposal would eliminate the need on the south for purchases of property or realignment of the Spring Gulch Road, and will include 300 foot paved safety areas at both ends of the runway. Additionally, we have been informed that this alternative is agreeable to the National Park Service and is being considered by the Airport Board.

The County has consistently requested that the FAA's preferred alternative, first of all address the safety concerns of the Airport Board in the most expeditious, effective manner possible. Secondly, that the National Park Service be able to accept the terms of the alternative. And thirdly, that the concerns of the residents surrounding the airport be given due consideration.

Qualifying our position with the caveat that we have only limited information this alternative appears to meet those criteria. Therefore, the Teton County Board of Commissioners would be able to support this alternative and encourages the FAA to pursue its possibilities.

Sincerely,

(original signed by)

Robert L. Shervin, Chairman

Teton County Commissioners