

U.S. Department of Transportation  
Federal Aviation Administration  
Southwest Region

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT  
And  
RECORD OF DECISION**

West Concourse Expansion Project  
William P. Hobby Airport  
Houston, Texas

January 2024

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Purpose of this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and Record of Decision (ROD) is to briefly present the reasons why the approval of Federal actions supporting the proposed West Concourse Expansion project at William P. Hobby Airport (HOU), which serves Harris County, Texas, will not have a significant effect on the human environment. The Federal actions necessary for implementation of the Proposed Actions are as follows:

- Unconditional approval of portions of the ALP that depict those portions of the Proposed Project subject to Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) review and approval pursuant to 49 USC § 47107(a)(16).
- Determinations under 49 U.S.C. §§ 47106 and 47107 relating to the eligibility of the Proposed Action for federal funding under the Airport Improvement Program.
- Determinations under 49 U.S.C. § 40117, as implemented by 14 CFR 158.25, to impose and use passenger facility charges (PFC) collected at the airport to assist with construction of potentially eligible items shown on the ALP.

The FAA is the Federal agency responsible for the approval of the proposed federal actions outlined below and analyzed in the Environmental Assessment (EA). The FAA has determined that the Proposed Action will have no significant impact on the human environment. Attached to this FONSI/ROD is the EA on which the finding is made.

## **2. SUMMARY**

The EA was prepared pursuant to the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 and the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 C.F.R. Parts 1500-1508). Additionally, the EA meets the guidelines identified in FAA Orders 1050.1F, *Environmental Impacts: Policies and Procedures* and 5050.4B, *NEPA Implementing Instructions for Airport Actions*.

### **3. BACKGROUND**

HOU is a commercial service airport owned and operated by HAS, the Airport's Sponsor, a department of the City of Houston. HOU is located approximately seven miles southeast of downtown Houston on approximately 1,502 acres. The FAA's National Plan of Integrated Airports System classifies the Airport as a medium hub airport, meaning that it serves between a quarter percent to one percent of all annual passengers boarding aircraft in the United States.

The Airport has three runways along with the associated taxiways, aprons, and other airfield facilities. The airport passenger terminal is located on the northern portion of the airfield, with associated access roadways and parking facilities. The existing Airport has 30 gates total, with 25 located on the Central Concourse and five located on the West Concourse. All gates at HOU are controlled by the Houston Airport System (HAS) or preferentially leased to the airline; no airline has exclusive rights.

### **4. PURPOSE AND NEED**

The purpose and need of the West Concourse Expansion project are described in Chapter 1 of the EA.

#### **A. Need of the Proposed Project**

The need of the Proposed Action is to meet near-term demand and future forecast operations. The Proposed Action will provide additional scheduling capacity during peak hours to accommodate an increasing number of passengers and crews. In turn, additional gates will also alleviate airfield congestion resulting from increasing aircraft activity within a limited apron terminal footprint. The one additional common-use gate is needed to similarly provide increased scheduling flexibility to all airlines to serve international and domestic markets with schedules that best align with connecting flights to and from HOU.

#### **B. Purpose of the Proposed Project**

The purpose of the Proposed Action at HOU is to respond to the near-term gate requests from airlines to efficiently accommodate near-term and future forecast peak hour flight schedules. Southwest Airlines has expressed the need to efficiently accommodate aircraft at HOU and HAS also has identified the need to build one additional common-use international gate. As the only hub airline at HOU, Southwest Airlines uses most of the gates at the Airport, with 24 gates of the 30 currently leased by Southwest Airlines for preferential use.

### **5. PROPOSED ACTIONS AND ALTERNATIVES**

#### **A. Proposed Action**

As described in Section 1.4 of this EA, the Proposed Action consists of implementing the following actions: 1) Construct six additional domestic gates, one additional international gate, and associated terminal passenger hold rooms and amenities; 2) Relocate Gate 5 to the north side of the West Concourse; 3) Add two remain-over-night parking positions; 4) Construct aircraft taxi lanes around the expansion; 5) Construct aircraft apron associated with the gates; 6) Extend existing utilities; 7) Construct jet fuel hydrant pits; 8) Construct stormwater detention and associated piping to and from the basin to stormwater drainage.

## **B. Alternatives**

The FAA explored and objectively evaluated reasonable alternatives that were considered practical and feasible in meeting the purpose and need. Chapter 2 of the EA describes the alternatives considered to meet the airport's purpose and need.

Four alternatives were proposed in the EA. These consisted of the Proposed Action as described above, the Use of Other Airports Alternative, the Different Terminal Expansion Layouts Alternative, and the No-Action Alternative. Note that the No Action Alternative is always required to be analyzed in accordance with the CEQ regulations 40 CFR § 1502.14.

The FAA has determined in this FONSI/ROD that the Proposed Action is the FAA's preferred and selected alternative. In arriving at this decision, the FAA considered all pertinent factors, including environmental impacts.

## **6. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES**

### **A. Potential Impact Resource Categories**

#### **i. Air Quality**

Construction Emissions - Temporary emissions will occur during construction of the Proposed Action. While project construction will span two years, construction emissions were calculated to occur within a single year to analyze emissions most conservatively; if the project will not exceed the NAAQS if condensed into one year, it will not do so in any given year of construction. HOU does expect to implement emissions reduction measures during construction to reduce construction-related emissions. For more information see Section 3.3.2 of the EA.

Operational Emissions - While overall operational emissions are expected to increase with activity in 2025 and 2030, this increase is not attributable to the Proposed Action and will occur in both No-Action and Proposed Action scenarios. Once construction is completed, aircraft may see reduced taxi time, distance, and idling due to increased gate availability. This will likely decrease emissions relative to the No Action Alternative. However, because there was no substantial data to quantify this exact number, the analysis assumes that taxi and idle times will remain constant in both the Proposed Action and the No Action. The reduction in emissions resulting from new gates is not expected to be significant. Because of this, no significant operational emissions impacts are expected as part of the Proposed Action. Table 3-4 of the EA shows operational and construction emissions for each of the years of analysis.

#### **ii. Climate**

The construction of the West Concourse Expansion project would generate a slight increase to Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions. Section 3.5. provides a detailed analysis of the Climate resource category. Furthermore, the estimates of social costs associated with the GHG emissions are considered potentially conservatively high. They are provided for disclosure and context, but such estimated costs may not actually result.

#### **iii. Historical, Architectural, Archeological, and Cultural Resources**

As described in Section 3.8 and Appendix D of the EA, there are no known or eligible archaeological or architectural resources within the Proposed Project's Area or Potential Effects

(APE), nor have any archeological surveys been conducted. One listed resource on the National Register for Historic Places (NRHP), the Houston Municipal Airport Terminal (1940 Terminal). It was listed in 2019, and it is located 0.43-mile southwest of the APE.

There will be no effects from ground disturbance to archaeological resources resulting from the Proposed Action. The 1940 Terminal located 0.43-mile southwest of the APE will not be affected by the Proposed Action as ground disturbing activities are limited to the Proposed Action area within the active airfield. The Texas Historic Commission (THC) concurred with the finding of no effect to archaeological resources and no effect to historic properties on July 21, 2023.

#### **iv. Noise and Noise-Compatible Land Use**

The Proposed Action will not alter flight paths nor altitudes, and while the project will increase efficiency, particularly during peak hours, the project will not lead to additional flights overall because future demand could be accommodated within existing terminal facilities. Therefore, changes in noise contours cannot be directly attributed to the Proposed Action, and the 2025 and 2030 aircraft noise exposure will be the same for both the No-Action and the Proposed Action alternatives. Section 3.11 and Appendix F of the attached EA address Noise and Noise Compatible Land Use.

#### **B. Resource Impact Categories Unaffected by the Proposed Action or Alternatives**

The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (§1501.9 (f)(1)) state that the lead agency shall identify and eliminate from detailed study the issues that are not significant or that have been covered by prior environmental review(s), narrowing the discussion of these issues in the document to a brief presentation of why they would not have a substantial effect on the human environment.

The analyses included in Chapter 3 of the attached EA demonstrates that many resource categories will not be impacted by implementation of the Proposed Action. In particular, Section 3.1 of the EA indicates that the following resource categories were not evaluated further in the EA because the resources were not located in proximity to the proposed project area: Coastal Resources, Farmlands, and Wild and Scenic Rivers.

In addition, other resource categories will not be discussed in detail in this FONSI/ROD because, as documented in Chapter 3 of the EA, there is no potential for significant impact (see FAA Order 1050.1F, Paragraph 4-3.3 and Exhibit 4-1 for information on significance thresholds and factors to consider in evaluating significance for an environmental impact category). These categories include Biological Resources (including fish, wildlife, and plants); U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Section 4(f) Lands; Hazardous Materials; Solid Waste and Pollution Prevention; Land Use; Natural Resources and Energy Supply; Socioeconomics; Environmental Justice; and Children's Environmental Health and Safety, Visual Effects, and Water Resources.

### **7. AGENCY COORDINATION AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

#### **A. Agency Coordination**

HAS consulted with FAA and THC on cultural resources during the development of this EA. As part of the evaluation of the affected environment, HAS prepared a Cultural Resources Review

which was submitted by FAA to THC on July 7, 2023. The THC concurred on July 21, 2023, that no historic properties will be affected by the Proposed Action.

## **B. Public Involvement**

To meet the NEPA requirement for public notification and comment, HAS and FAA placed the Draft EA in publicly accessible locations. The Draft EA was made available for public review and comment for a period of 30 days. Additionally, notifications were provided for the opportunity to request a public meeting during the public comment period. The public notice of availability (NOA) was published on December 12, 2023, in the Houston Chronicle. Electronic copies of the Draft EA and supporting materials were available online from December 12, 2023, to January 12th, 2024, at HAS website (<https://fly2houston.com/newsroom/releases/notice-draft-environmental-assessment-william-p-hobby-airport-west-concourse>). Hard copies of the document were also available for review at Houston Airport System Infrastructure Division Office (IDO), 111 Standifer Street, Humble, TX 77338. No comments were received.

## **8. CONDITIONS AND MITIGATION**

As prescribed by 40 CFR § 1505.3, the FAA shall take steps as appropriate to the action, such as through special conditions in grant agreements, property conveyance deeds, releases, airport layout plan approvals, and contract plans and specifications, and shall monitor these as necessary to assure that representations made in the EA and FONSI will be carried out. Specific conditions of approval associated with this project are listed below:

- The airport will comply with Texas Commission on Environmental Quality's Texas Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Construction General Permit. A Notice of Intent will be required. A Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) will be prepared and implemented, and a construction site notice will be posted on the construction site. The SWPPP will include, among other items, identification of appropriate erosion and sediment controls and stormwater best management practices.
- If unanticipated archeological deposits encountered, work to be halted immediately, and FAA and Archeology Division of the THC to be contacted.

## **9. AGENCY FINDINGS**

The FAA makes the following determinations for this project based upon a careful review of the attached Final EA, the supporting administrative record, and appropriate supporting information. The FAA weighed both the potential positive and negative consequences that this Proposed Action may have on the quality of the human environment. The FAA has determined that the Proposed Action meets the purpose and need of the proposed project and best implements necessary airfield modifications to meet FAA design standards.

The following determinations are prescribed by the statutory provisions set forth in the Airport and Airway Improvement Act of 1982, as codified in 49 USC §47106 and 47107.

- The FAA has determined the Proposed Action would result in safe and efficient use of U.S. airspace as prescribed in 49 U.S.C. §40103(a).

- The Proposed Action is reasonably necessary for use in air commerce (49 U.S.C. §44502(b)). The Proposed Action is reasonably consistent with existing plans of public agencies responsible for development of the area surrounding the airport (49 U.S.C. §47106(a)(1)).
- The interests of the community in or near where the Proposed Action is located have been given fair consideration (49 U.S.C. §47106(b)(2)).

## 10. DECISION AND ORDER

After careful and thorough consideration of the facts contained herein, the undersigned finds the proposed Federal action 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 other applicable environmental requirements. The undersigned also finds the proposed Federal action is not a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment or including any condition requiring any consultation pursuant to section 102(2)(C) of NEPA. As a result, the FAA will not prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for this action.

This decision does not constitute a commitment of funds under the Airport Improvement Program or Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021 (IIJA), Public Law 117-58 (also referred to as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL)) however, it does fulfill the environmental prerequisites to approve applications for grants of AIP or BIL funds for the proposed project in the future. (49 U.S.C § 47101)

Accordingly, under the authority delegated to me by the Administrator of the FAA, I approve and direct that agency action be taken to implement the proposed HOU West Concourse Expansion Project presented to the FAA by Houston Airport System. The approved action is specifically described in Part IV of this FONSI/ROD and identified in the EA as the Proposed Action. This approval is to be taken under the authority of 49 U.S.C. 40104, 44701, 46110, 47101, and 47122.

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Ignacio Flores  
Director, FAA Southwest Region

### Right of Appeal

This FONSI/ROD constitutes a final order of the FAA Administrator and is subject to the exclusive judicial review under 49 USC§ 46110 by the US Circuit Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia or the US Circuit Court of Appeals for the circuit in which the person contesting the decision resides or has its principal place of business. Any party having substantial interest in this order may apply for review of the decision by filing a petition for review in the appropriate US Court of Appeals no later than 60 days after the order is issued in accordance with the provisions of 49 USC§ 46110. Any party seeking to stay implementation of the ROD must file an application with the FAA prior to seeking judicial relief as provided in Rule 18(a) of the Federal Rules of Appellate Procedure.