

## Airport changes causing concerns

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Built in 1943 as a World War II military training facility, the airport and the land around it is once again a battlefield. As the airport is upgraded there is the potential of adding an air traffic control tower to the facility, creating a rise in interest by commercial and industrial users.

Many local residents and farmers oppose this upgrade.

“I have lived on a ranch in the Aurora Airport area since 1976 and our livestock suffers from being frightened by all the air traffic,” said Karen Hatheway, a local rancher.

At one time or another, area industrial parks have expressed strong opposition to the competition that would be generated if Aurora is modernized and development is allowed.

The Jan. 23 meeting began as a meeting of the small group of Friends of French Prairie to discuss what is happening at the Aurora State Airport and surrounding area and how sewer and water services would be provided.

It soon changed when Marion County Commissioner Patti Milne told the audience that “the county has applied for a \$3 million state Connect Oregon II construction funds grant to construct a control tower at the airport.”

Submitted last summer, the commissioner’s application was unknown to many in the audience, many of whom expressed feelings that it is an additional deterrent to the effort to save farm land in the area.

Others talked of having a public vote on expansion of the airport use.

Others expressed concern for their personal safety on the ground and the added noise in their homes, let alone the traffic congestion and potential danger on the area’s secondary road system.

Users of the airport expressed the need for a control tower for safety reasons to avoid a midair collision as use of the Aurora facility increases.

At an elevation of 200 feet, the airport was constructed in 1943 as a military aircraft training facility and is 5,004 feet long and 100 feet wide. According to state records, 420 total aircraft are located out of the airport.

Of the total, 322 are single engine, 38 are multiple engines, 33 are jets and 27 are helicopters.

The Marion County application for funding of a control center at the airport is being made to Connect Oregon II, a 2007 legislatively-passed program to upgrade state infrastructure and there are 78 applications for a variety of type projects, all competing for an estimated \$100 million that is part of Connect Oregon II.

Connect Oregon I was for highways and bridges. Connect Oregon II is for airports, railroads, freight and public transportation.

The Aurora airport application is made under the aviation requirements and is included in the Region Two section of the Oregon Department of Transportation's (ODOT) operation areas. Submitted last year, the application presentation was made before the aviation requirement deadline Jan. 24, along with other projects around the state.

From that process, the application then will move to a review by ODOT's local advisory board, then ODOT staff members. It could potentially be before the Transportation Commission in May or June.

The Portland area has three major airport facilities in the Washington, Multnomah and Clackamas County areas.

One is the main Portland airport, the second is the Hillsboro airport and the third is the Troutdale airport.

In the 1970s the Tri-County area had identified Mulino State Airport as the next major extension of the system and while there is work going on there, interest seems to have shifted to the Aurora State Airport with a bountiful amount of land for jobs, close proximity to I-5 and water from the Willamette River.

Both the land for development and the airport have limited facilities in the area of water, sewer and road development.

All of this discussion about the airport, which has had two previous improvements, is emotionally wrapped up in the 2004-05 Metro discussion of crossing the Willamette River with their urban growth boundary expansion and the more recent purchases of Pacific Natural Foods, including a dairy and creating their own organic dairy.

The processing plant, considered at one time on a 90-acre parcel near Fargo Road, also has local property owners concerned about their wells and truck traffic on the narrow country roads that run from I-5 to the location slightly northwest of the Donald-Aurora I-5 interchange.

Others have discussed the idea of a casino in the area, as well as the possibility of moving the Portland Meadows horse racing track to a site also near the Donald-Aurora interchange.