

Aurora Airport Master Plan contains more than \$20 million in projects

Patrick Johnson, Canby Herald
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The group at the epicenter of the Aurora State Airport master plan debate held their last meeting without so much as a cross word.

It was a far cry from a year ago, when members of the Oregon Aviation Board were talking down Wilsonville City Councilors, neighbors and pilots in heated exchanges.

"Boy, you guys are making this easy," said Rainse Anderson, a consultant with WH Pacific, Monday night. Outlined were the project costs and potential timelines of when the improvements could be made at the airport.

To construct all projects in the master plan, including the air traffic control tower that is currently being engineered - will cost between \$20 and \$24 million. The price difference depends on whether or not the Federal Aviation Administration approves the use of displaced thresholds — a partial runway extension that doesn't require mandatory clearances.

The master plan currently recommends using an 800-foot displaced threshold at the north end of the state's third-busiest airport, to allow aircraft to use the extra space for takeoffs, but not landings. The threshold would allow a runway extension to the north without impacting Columbia Helicopters or Keil Road to the south.

The displaced threshold option is expected to cost approximately \$2.61 million, with the FAA paying for the majority of the project.

Early indications are the FAA is going to reject the displaced threshold option, meaning that the master plan will contain a 1,000-foot runway extension to the south.

This would require the closure or diversion of Keil Road south of the airport and that farmland and several homes in Deer Creek Estates would need to be purchased to meet FAA requirements.

The southern runway extension is estimated at \$7.08 million, with the FAA paying for more than \$6 million of the project.

Mitch Swecker, director of the Oregon Department of Aviation, said that one or the other of the projects would be done but not both extensions.

"I want to make it clear that all of the money we are talking about tonight comes from user fees from airport users," said Bruce Bennett, owner of Aurora Aviation. "These aren't tax dollars as some have tried to characterize them. This comes from fees, aircraft fuel taxes and other revenues generated on airports."

Any runway extension to the north or south wouldn't happen until at least 2020, according to the master plan. Sarah Lucas, another consultant with WH Pacific, said the tower project was funded and moving forward with a construction date sometime in 2012.

Other short-term projects at the airport include helicopter landing pads, hangar development and environmental assessment of the proposed runway improvements. All of the short-term projects are outlined to be completed by 2015.

Anderson said the next step for the master plan was an FAA review, and then it would go to through the Marion County planning process to be added into the comprehensive plan.

"There are still going to be opportunities to talk about this plan when it goes through the Marion County process," Anderson said.