

Airport economic benefit is small

Reader View

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Just the facts, if you please.

Ben Altman's response to my Reader View ("Airport is vital to region's economy," Dec. 18) is appreciated, but some facts need to be addressed. First, the "economic benefit" data he shared is anecdotal and/or dated. All the general comments about Aurora Airport workers buying coffee, lunch and haircuts are just that: observations. The data he cites comes from a 2007 Oregon Aviation Plan and is no longer relevant. It was published before the Great Recession, and ODA's own data (from the master plan) on based aircraft and flight operations for 2012 show substantial decreases since 2007.

For example, estimated based aircraft in 2007 was 420 and for 2012 was 370, a 12 percent reduction. The most recent data for jobs is the 2011 census (pulling actual employment and unemployment data) that I cited, showing 872 workers, not 999 — a 13 percent drop. Second, having worked for over a decade at an Oregon manufacturer with 400-500 employees, I can state with some certainty that the majority of workers in the wage range of \$26K to \$36K per year do not regularly "go out to lunch" in Wilsonville or anywhere else. Certainly aviation businesses at Aurora Airport spend money in Wilsonville, and many owners and execs undoubtedly spend personal money there too. However, the wages of most employees are spent where they live, and only 3.7 percent live in Wilsonville (according to the 2011 census).

Yes, there are corporations whose aircraft use the Aurora Airport, and they do contribute to Wilsonville's economy through hotel and meal purchases, etc. The source of that spending, though, comes from the previously discussed less than 1 percent who own aircraft, and that begs the question about the use of so much tax money to pay for infrastructure to benefit that small segment. Notice that one side here is using published economic data we can find and the other is using economic data that favors their case. What's missing? An objective third party economic analysis that goes beyond local spending and considers public expenditure and private benefit.

The citizens of Wilsonville deserve it, as do those of south Clackamas County and North Marion County. They're the ones paying the taxes and getting the impact; they're also receiving very few of the benefits.

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