

Aviation chairman takes on Wilsonville and Clackamas County — again

Mark Gardiner outlines what is happening at the airport and what the state would like to see

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Photo By: Patrick Johnson

Airport traffic not a concern

Mark Gardiner, chairman of the Oregon Aviation Board, says worries by the city of Wilsonville and Clackamas County about the traffic impact on Boone Bridge by expanding the Aurora State Airport are unfounded.

WILSONVILLE — Mark Gardiner knows there are opponents to expansion at the Aurora State Airport.

He also knows much of it stems from Wilsonville and Clackamas County.

Yet, he didn't shy away last week from pointing out fallacies in their arguments, even going as far as producing a study examining the current impact of the airport on the Boone Bridge.

Gardiner is chairman of the Oregon Aviation Board who spoke at last week's South Metro Area Chamber of Commerce Leadership Luncheon, hosted by the Wilsonville Chamber at the Holiday Inn-Wilsonville.

During his remarks, Gardiner addressed not only the current economic conditions at the airport, but balked at the city and county's claims that the airport should stay the way it is.

The city of Wilsonville has claimed, he said, it wants "no development at the Aurora airport," in part because of the impact it will have on Boone Bridge traffic.

Gardiner showed his audience a traffic study conducted by the Oregon Department of Transportation that shows the airport actually has extremely little impact on car and truck traffic across the bridge.

He shared other statistics about the airport, in particular that about 350 aircraft are based there serving many companies in the Wilsonville area, such as Sysco Foods, Fry's Electronics, Costco, Xerox, Coca-Cola, Rockwell Collins and even Cabela's.

Gardiner said 42 percent of the users of the airport are from Clackamas County and 32 percent are from Washington County, many more than the 9 percent of users from Marion County where the airport actually is located.

Currently there are 800 to 1,000 jobs at the airport, which has a \$25 million to \$35 million payroll and \$75 million in business sales, he said.

"We are committed to trying to find a win-win where possible," Gardiner said. "We are really not prepared to accept the 'nothing should happen at Aurora' as the outcome of that. First off, as the owner of the airport that would be a dumb decision economically."

He also said that the master planning process does not include a land expansion of the airport.

"We don't intend to build a FedEx sorting facility on Langdon Farms, or any of the other rumors you have heard out there," Gardiner said. "We just intend for this to be an airport that serves the business community safely and with as little noise impact as possible."

Gardiner took issue with the assertion by Wilsonville and Clackamas County officials that Interstate 5's Boone Bridge, south of Wilsonville, wouldn't be able to handle additional traffic from expanded airport development.

He said a traffic study conducted by ODOT in October shows the Aurora airport contributes about 1.5 percent of the traffic crossing the Boone Bridge, and 20 percent of the traffic on Arndt Road. The airport generates approximately 2,400 trips through the 11 gates. The traffic study was done after Wilsonville, Charbonneau and Clackamas County officials urged the Oregon Department of Aviation to conduct the study.

"The portion of that that will go through the Boone Bridge is a lot, about 75 percent of the trips, which again reflects the fact that 75 percent of the users are in Clackamas and Washington counties," he said. "Those 1,800 trips are a tiny fraction of what happens on the Boone Bridge. So the idea that the airport, or growth at the airport, would somehow stress the Boone Bridge is not founded in reality."

Clackamas County Commissioner Charlotte Lehan, who attended the luncheon, said Thursday that she felt the traffic analysis didn't include statistics from Clackamas County and therefore wasn't a complete look at the impacts the airport has on the transportation system.