



South Metro Airport Action Council

<http://quiettheskies.org>

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Policy Statement: *Get Citizens More Involved in Airport Management and Planning*

The official airport manager at Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport (MSP), the Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC), has three duties:

- to airfield users (airlines),
- to the national air transportation system and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), and,
- **legally and politically, to the public.**

Their duty to serve the public is the greatest, and the most complicated, because the needs are so varied.

Indirect Representation Isn't Working.

Local government entities around the airport are the stewards for land use and environmental protection. MAC and the cities over-stepped, however, by eliminating the MSP Airport Sound Abatement Committee (MASAC).

MAC set up the Noise Oversight Committee (NOC) after 18 critical months without organized citizen advice¹.

During that time, properties were condemned and land uses were changed for MSP expansion: houses were demolished because of excessive noise intensity from increased operations; commercial buildings were bought and demolished for flight path clearance; land use was limited for safety zones and easements.

¹ Including September 11, 2001 and the aftermath, and a long delay in MSP Expansion projects.

The process set up for determining "compatible land use (zoning)" around the airport perimeter limited citizen participation in many ways, including onerous NOC By-Laws, MAC staff interventions, and extended project management.

Complicated laws about how much pollution is acceptable are subject to interpretations and limited by lack of enforcement funds. Noise exposure, for example, is an issue never settled; airport activities are always changing. Public health impacts of overflights are better understood each year, and earlier findings obviated.

Public Defined.

The public includes neighborhood folks.

Residents, students, workers, patients, clients, and visitors to neighborhoods near MSP are impacted economically, personally, and socially.

The public includes the air service consumers.

Travelers' economic rights and benefits are jeopardized by monopolization, by sweetheart deals between the airport and the airlines, and by political considerations.

The public includes the next generation of area business and leisure travelers.

In a global economy, commerce depends on the movement of people and high-value products by air. Many Minnesota businesses rely on tourism or temporary residents (visiting customers). Local governments, however, may subsume this public interest by rivalry.

Monitoring MSP

SMAAC closely monitors airport planning by the MAC and the Metropolitan Council.

The MAC wound up expanding the Northwest Airlines' hub more than tending to State needs for economic growth.

The Commission relied on covenants offsetting the airfield expansion costs, because at the time expansion greatly benefited Northwest Airlines.

Northwest's subsequent bankruptcy and merger with Delta greatly reduced airline jobs, on-site and off-site suppliers' businesses, and airport employment. However, there were no rate reductions and the traffic at peak hours reflects that the real "capacity" of MSP was far more than the 25% deemed needed in 1996 to support Minnesota economic growth through 2020.

Delta Airlines' flight banks at MSP were reduced in 2008 -10, but close connections and many more Delta flights than all other airlines combined remain².

As part of the expansion, the MAC added various terminal services for use by local travelers: parking, transit, baggage handling, roads, and security checkpoints. These services might have been funded by landing fees and gate leases as projected, but the MAC decided to help the incumbent airlines weather 9/11 and recession problems.

The MAC now subsidizes airline costs from parking and concession revenues, and adapts capital and operating budgets to flight activities that were 20 to 30 percent less in 2010 than in 2005.

Delta Airlines gouges local travelers with high fares and fees. Economy seats departing MSP are "blocked" – lower advance fares are advertised but only a few can be purchased.

Local passenger service capacity – not use or need – is less than planned for 2011, but three-runway operations at high rates are inexplicably continued at peak hours.

While planning by the MAC and Met Council gives lip service to economic growth and environmental protection, not enough is being done to increase access to safe, sufficient, and affordable air transportation, or to reduce exposure to noise and pollution.

The MAC exists not to be self-financed through contracts with airlines, but to meet the public needs for safe, sufficient, and affordable air transportation services and to assure that MSP is a good and responsible neighbor.

MAC 2030 Plan

In a perhaps honest attempt to deal with these issues last year, MAC published its LTCP -- Long-Term Comprehensive Plan -- calling for further expansion . The timing of each of four phases would be dependent on airline needs.

The LTCP is to spend \$2 billion in the next 15 to 18 years for:

- Terminal additions and remodeling, including improvements of airline leased spaces
- A second International arrivals area
- More parking ramps and retail leased-space at both terminals
- Airliner ramps, gates, and service areas
- A hotel , built to be leased to a hospitality company
- Re-route taxiways via bridges over a relocated roadway from Highway 5 to the Lindbergh Terminal

The Met Council imposed related conditions on the LTCP. The cost and benefit of the above planned investments is re-visited each year. But the public benefits of further expansion are compromised because airlines, connecting passengers, MAC enterprises, and airport functions are mainly served.

² The Delta schedule reductions were at off-peak hours or the "edges" of the hub peak hours.

Safety

The LTCP delays taxiway, overflow aircraft parking, and ramp improvements, needed for ground safety now until after the gate expansion and terminal remodeling. In the interim, the gate and terminal improvements increase congestion.

More aircraft would likely move around the Lindbergh Terminal, at peak hub hours particularly. The planes would form lines and pull up to gates on the South and East sides of the Lindbergh Terminal obstructing the view from, or out-of-sight of, the Tower.

High rates and complicated runway use and airspace management would continue or increase. FAA system improvements are not planned for years, and may not be suitable for as many operations per hour as planned due to space limitations at the MSP site.

Restoring the Delta hub – the goal for most of the LTCP projects, -- benefits connecting passengers, not local passengers. A restored hub will not provide the revenue or replace the executive and union jobs lost.

Airline competition

Airline capital spending decreased in 2009, and the MAC's operating costs since completion of the airfield expansion have not declined on a per-flight basis.

Even so, Southwest and other airlines were able to slip into the gaps left after Delta negotiated flight reductions and work-force changes.

Southwest Airlines' entrance and additions here are related to Delta's reductions and to uncertain economic recovery prospects. Also, reduced service by AirTran and ATA between Chicago Midway and MSP was a rare opportunity.

But MAC still plans to expand more for Delta than for competitors as the economic recovery proceeds. The LTCP turns over the Lindbergh Terminal to the Delta hub after remodeling gates for Delta's planned fleet.

New gates at Humphrey would be occupied by United, American, and other non-Sky Team carriers with no net passenger-capacity gain nor new cities served directly.

Southwest Airlines grows through more flights per year per aircraft, higher load factors, and pioneering service in places where growth in market-share is possible. Delta, at the same time, reduced capacity, if not routes, leaving space at MSP, at Chicago, and elsewhere.

Southwest can keep growing its current routes those acquired in its merger with AirTran to grub market share from the major airlines where the city-to-city passenger demand, at its lowest, is still several flights per day and somewhat competitive.

Terminal Usage

To facilitate more destination service by competitors, and fewer flights by contract operators and their ilk at MSP, MAC needs to re-sort gates and re-plan terminal use.

MSP should have one International/wide-body terminal area, one charter and corporate area, one "regional" small capacity/flight area, and one area for narrow-body airliners. This would give local passengers more choice and more airlines access to connecting passenger demand.

The government would benefit (fuel efficiency is a national goal) by regulating inter-line reservations and ticketing to level the playing field.

The State would benefit from lower fares and safer operations. Economic growth by small businesses is more likely to create jobs than subsidizing Delta.

The neighbors would get less noise and pollution exposure.

Next Steps

We hope for broader representation and more open discussion about LTCP costs and benefits. Indirect costs include damages to public health and well-being and the environment. Safe, sufficient, and affordable air services requires dealing with the limitations of MSP's small urban site **No compromises reducing safety, increasing noise and pollution, or limiting affordable capacity should be continued.**