8th NATIONAL AVIATION SYSTEM PLANNING SYMPOSIUM

Transportation Research Board
in cooperation with the
Texas Transportation Institute, TAMU

Galveston, Texas
Monday, May 21, 2012

IMPLICATIONS OF THE FAA ASSET STUDY FOR STATE SYSTEM PLANNING

John C. Eagerton IV, D.P.A.
Bureau Chief
Alabama Department of Transportation
Aeronautics Bureau

MY GOAL TODAY…

- BRIEFLY REVIEW OUR NATION'S AIRPORT SYSTEM / PLANNING PROCESS
- PROVIDE ONE STATE'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE FAA ASSET STUDY UNDERTAKING
- REVIEW ASSET STUDY ACCOMPLISHMENTS /CONCERNS
- ASSET IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE STATE SYSTEM PLANNING

THE NATION'S AIR TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM IN A "NUTSHELL"

- DEFINED IN THE NATIONAL PLAN OF INTEGRATED AIRPORT SYSTEMS – NPIAS
- NPIAS IDENTIFIES AIRPORTS ESSENTIAL TO NATIONAL AIR TRANSPORTATION NEEDS
- IDENTIFIES THOSE AIRPORTS ELIGIBLE TO RECEIVE FEDERAL AIRPORT IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM GRANTS

NATIONAL SYSTEM COMPOSITION

- 494 COMMERCIAL SERVICE AIRPORTS
- 269 GENERAL AVIATION RELIEVER AIRPORTS (relieves congestion at commercial service airports)
- 2,569 GENERAL AVIATION AIRPORTS
- FOR A TOTAL OF 3,332 NPIAS AIRPORTS

PLANNING THE NATIONAL AIR TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

- SYSTEM ESSENTIALLY BUILT AROUND INDIVIDUAL STATE AIRPORT SYSTEMS
- FAA ENCOURAGES/FUNDS STATE AIRPORT SYSTEM PLANS
- STATE PLANS ARE USED BY FAA TO UPDATE THE NPIAS
- STATE PLANNING PROCESS IS EFFORT TO FORECAST AIRPORT IMPROVEMENT NEEDS & DETERMINE THE “MIX” OF AIRPORTS NEEDED TO SERVE THE STATE’S FUTURE AIR TRANSPORTATION DEMAND
- PLANS USED TO MAKE STRATEGIC DECISIONS ABOUT AIRPORT IMPROVEMENT FUNDING
- FAA GOAL – CONVENIENT ACCESS TO A SAFE, EFFICIENT AIR TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

- A SYSTEM IN TRANSITION – RECENT TRENDS & EVENTS

- UNLOCKING THE AVIATION TRUST FUND (AIR-21, Vision 100) in 2000
- NEXTGEN
- AIRPORT & AIRSPACE CONGESTION AT COMMERCIAL SERVICE AIRPORTS (DEMAND FACTOR) – PASSENGER FLIGHT DELAYS
- 9/11 AND ITS IMPACT ON AIRPORT SECURITY
- AIRLINE BANKRUPTCIES AND MERGERS
- RAPIDLY FLUCTUATING (MOSTLY INCREASING) FUEL COSTS
- ESCALATING CONSTRUCTION COSTS (Steel, asphalt, etc.)
- REAUTHORIZATION “WARS” – FUNDING THE FUTURE SYSTEM
- LACK OF PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT

AIRPORT SYSTEM PLANNING
THE CURRENT PRACTICE

- Current Airport System Planning Driven by FAA AC 150/5070-7 – The Airport System Planning Process
- Estimates future needs by comparing existing airport facilities with projections of future traffic
- Based on aviation activity forecasts by aircraft mix
- Creates a “cookie-cutter” bias that constrains planning innovation
- Induces a form of “groupthink” among airport system planners

TRB/ACRP Synthesis 14
Airport System Planning Practices
(2009)

- Some Conclusions...
  - Individual airports pursue individual agendas without considering the overall airport system in which they operate
  - Airport system plan sponsors often lack both the authority & funding to implement key plan components
  - Airport system plans often difficult to keep current due to a dynamic & constantly changing industry
  - Investment in system airports often not tied to system recommendations and measures to demonstrate if investment is improving overall system performance

WHAT IS ASSET…
AND WHY WAS IT UNDERTAKEN?

- WHAT? Airport System Strategic Evaluation Task – a meta-analysis of the nation's general aviation airport system

- WHY?
  - Airports have evolved to meet changing needs but existing federal airport categories have not
  - One category (general aviation) does not adequately describe the variety of roles and functions they serve in their community or in the national system
  - Public attention that questioned the need to invest in our nation's GA airports
  - Ability to provide a better description & explain the many roles / functions that GA airports serve

The ASSET Process

- FAA compiled and reviewed numerous state system plans with particular emphasis on those that had developed descriptive classifications for their airports
- Gathered / analyzed wide variety of data (activity, infrastructure, geographic, etc.)
- Collaborated with NASAO & other industry associations / representatives
- Conducted numerous iterations of the data to arrive at logical & descriptive airport categories
- Continuous coordination with stakeholders

ASSET OUTCOMES

- Reported earlier today by Ben DeLeon
- First effort by FAA to define and distinguish different categories of general aviation airports
- Publication and dissemination of a document that will be periodically updated

Stakeholder Concerns

- ASSET study does not take into account the economic impact of GA airports
  - Generated intense discussion during stakeholder meetings
  - Conclusion: Economic impact data can “cut” two ways; more research necessary
- ASSET study did not allow for individual airports to comment; inadequate comment period
  - GA airports were represented by stakeholder groups
  - Future opportunities to comment following report release
- ASSET study will be used by FAA to make future funding decisions
  - Let’s hope so – original intent of study was (and is) to help justify GA airport infrastructure investment
  - Most states are already using their category-based state system plans to make resource allocation decisions

- ASSET STUDY –
FUTURE CHALLENGES

- Overcoming stakeholder skepticism
- FAA commitment to refining classification descriptions as more knowledge/input is gained
  - Some classifications may be overly broad
- Acceptance by state & regional planning agencies
- Integrating economic impact measures into GA airport system planning in such a way that some airports are not penalized

ASSET STUDY DOES NOT…

- Establish a “one size fits all” approach to state-level airport system planning
- Constrain a state’s ability to revise & implement airport system plans that are unique to the physical, economic & social trends or characteristics in their area
- “Pigeonhole” GA airports into a permanent category
- Establish a prescriptive method of airport system planning

ASSET STUDY DOES…

- Establish a participatory process between the FAA & its stakeholders that can & should be used as a model for examining other airport policy issues with national, state & regional implications
- Create a more descriptive explanation of the distinct roles that different GA airports serve in our nation's air transportation system
- Recognize the important role that GA airports play in interstate commerce
- Help justify continued investment in the GA component of our nation's air transportation system

ASSET STUDY IMPLICATIONS
- THE NEAR TERM -

- Provides states & regions with a framework for the continued development of their respective GA airport systems
- Identified & utilized data sets (e.g., O&D IFR activity) that can be shared with or emulated by state & regional planning agencies
- Developed a study framework that can be useful for states when updating their airport system plans
- Creates a document that can be utilized by state/regional planning agencies to justify the continued investment in our GA airport system
- Airport name changes

ASSET STUDY IMPLICATIONS
- THE LONGER TERM -

- Has the potential to transform airport system planning, particularly at the state and regional level
- Has the potential to make the NPIAS a more meaningful planning document for the nation's air transportation system; can move the NPIAS beyond an inventory
- Initiated a process for the periodic, continuous review of the GA airport system
- Provides a way to link and integrate GA airport system planning w/ other planning disciplines – with some exceptions, airport system planning has been divorced from other forms of planning our state/regional/local communities & infrastructure

CLOSING THOUGHTS

- Airport location is largely determined by where commercial activity takes place
- Airport system planning can be viewed as being driven, in large part, by the location and type of commercial activity that occurs in a given, defined area
- Many state system plans have made an effort to measure the economic impact of individual airports and its airport system in the aggregate
  - The economic impact conundrum – Should airports with less economic impact receive less funding?

HOW DO WE RESOLVE THIS DILEMMA AND ADVANCE AIRPORT SYSTEM PLANNING?

- Better integrate & coordinate airport system planning with other state/regional/local planning disciplines
- Develop planning models that strongly correlate aviation activity within defined geographic regions with their associated socioeconomic characteristics
- Measure aviation activity within defined regions
- By applying the ASSET airport categories, identify the “airport mix” needed to support defined regions & their socioeconomic activity

HOW DO WE GET THERE FROM HERE?

- FAA & states form a task force to work with other planning disciplines to study/recommend ways to more fully integrate airport system planning with other planning efforts
- Encourage ACRP to conduct further studies with the goal to develop a new model for airport system planning
- Involve other planning disciplines in the 9th Annual Airport System Planning Symposium
- Continue the dialog between the FAA, TRB and the states