

RHODE ISLAND AIRPORT CORPORATION
T.F. GREEN AIRPORT
WARWICK, RHODE ISLAND

AIRPORT MASTER PLAN GUIDING PRINCIPLES

PLANNING FOR THE AIR TRANSPORTATION
NEEDS OF RHODE ISLAND AND
THE SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND REGION

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CHALLENGE: DEFINING THE FUTURE OF T.F. GREEN AIRPORT

T. F. Green Airport is owned by the state of Rhode Island and managed by the Rhode Island Airport Corporation. The airport is located in the City of Warwick, Rhode Island and is part of the Federal Aviation Administration's New England regional airport system that includes Boston-Logan, Manchester, Bradley, and Portland airports. In addition to serving the air transportation needs of Rhode Island's one million residents, T. F. Green also draws travelers from neighboring states.

In September 1996, the State of Rhode Island opened a new 15-gate passenger terminal to replace a 1960s vintage terminal building. Due to rapid growth, the terminal was expanded in 1998 to 19 gates and now serves over 5 million passengers annually. Since the opening of the new terminal, the airport has continued to experience above average growth with the introduction of low-cost airlines and additional service. T. F. Green Airport is now known for its low fares, increased frequency, hub and non-hub service, and a significant increase in efficiency and ease of access.

The rapid growth in activity at T. F. Green has invigorated the area's economy. Where an annual airport economic benefit to the state of Rhode Island was estimated at \$500 million in the late 1980s, economic activity generated from airport and related business has grown to over \$1 billion annually. Revenue at T. F. Green has been finally available to repair and improve airport facilities, keeping the airport safe and efficient for travelers. Such repairs and improvements could help further attract business investment and solidify Rhode Island as one of the best places to live in New England.

Increased revenue as a result of airline activity growth has also helped the Airport Corporation match substantial amounts of federal funding provided to address the impacts of such growth in the City of Warwick. Approximately \$100 million in sound insulation and voluntary home acquisition programs has either been spent or programmed by the Federal Aviation Administration and the Airport Corporation to mitigate close-in noise impacts of the airport. An additional \$15 million of RIAC and state funds in the past three years alone has been spent on improving water and air quality at the airport.

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The existing Airport Master Plan, completed in early 1997, did not envision all of the tremendous growth that has occurred over the past four years. Between 1997 and 2001, much of the twenty-year capital program has been implemented, rendering the existing Airport Master Plan in need of an update. The challenge of accommodating future air transportation demand at T. F. Green will be in modernizing facilities in a manner that is both responsive to public air travel needs and responsive to host community impacts. Achieving a balance between accommodating any identified need for further airport growth and minimizing community impacts can best be accomplished with a set of "Guiding Principles". With these Guiding Principles, information and decision-making during the course of the master planning process can be evaluated by each of the many constituencies that the Rhode Island Airport Corporation is responsible to, as to whether a balance of needs is being sought and achieved.

Below is a summary of issues identified in the charrette process. Then, the Guiding Principles for the Airport Master Plan are presented, each of which are designed to assist RIAC in meeting the challenge of defining the future role of T. F. Green Airport for Rhode Island and the southern New England Region for the next twenty years and beyond.

SUMMARY OF ISSUES

The Rhode Island Airport Corporation (RIAC) decided that a sound Master Plan process should begin with early input from as many viewpoints as might be feasible to gather. Gaining early input into the master planning process was intended to help everyone understand the range of issues and information needing to be gathered and studied by study consultants. Thus, a series of meetings were conducted to gather information from different constituent groups on what they considered to be the *strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and constraints* of T. F. Green Airport.

To assist in gathering the information, a standard questionnaire was developed and used for each “charrette” (See Appendix A). In addition to the charrette survey, Warwick citizens and the Cranston government distributed their own surveys to gauge the concerns of their constituents. The Airport Master Plan Guiding Principles found on the following pages were drawn from input received during the master planning charrettes and the independent survey results of Warwick (Appendix C) and Cranston (Appendix E).

During the charrettes, it was discovered that many constituencies agreed that the airport has several unique strengths that set T. F. Green apart from other airports in the region. Chief among these strengths is the easy access to and through the airport, the low fares provided by the competing airlines, and the airport’s significant influence on, and contribution to, the region’s economy. Other significant strengths that define T. F. Green include its unique location in central Rhode Island and the southern New England region, its relatively small size, and its reputation for friendly, dependable and convenient service.

RIAC’s constituencies also recognized principal areas of weakness that the Rhode Island Airport Corporation must address if it is to be successful in balancing the needs of airport users and the host community. For airport users, an identified weakness was in limitations in air service to desired destinations due to physical constraints of the existing airfield. This limitation reduces the convenience of travel from T. F. Green to the West Coast and other desired destinations, and possibly results in diversion to other New England airports for more flexible air service. This weakness was seen to possibly affect the competitiveness and long-term success of T. F. Green.

Weakness was also found in T. F. Green’s relationship with its host community (the City of Warwick) and the airport’s close proximity and resultant impacts to residential neighborhoods. Residents of the City of Warwick and bordering communities find the airport to reduce their quality of life due to aircraft noise, air pollution and odors, and congestion on local roads.

The citizen surveys conducted during this process indicated a clear preference for retaining the airport at its present size. In addition, the City of Warwick has long sought increased financial support for hosting T. F. Green and the millions of passengers who use it yearly. However, due to federal legislation prohibiting diversion of airport revenue, RIAC is limited in its ability to compensate the City of Warwick for payments above those that the City receives for direct provision of services.

The following constituent groups were included in the charrette process:

- RIAC Board of Directors
- Airport Tenants and Users
- Regional Transportation and Community Planners
- Business Community Representatives
- State Leadership Representatives
- Federal Aviation Administration
- Regional Airports
- RIAC Senior Staff
- City of Warwick Elected Officials
- General Public

Through the charrette process, a set of common responses for each question began to surface. Following is a summary of the most common responses. Appendix B provides a summary of each charrette, including the date, participants, and a list of all the responses.

STRENGTHS

Successful Outcome of Terminal Reconstruction

- Easy/convenient access
- Low Fares, Increased Number of Destinations
- Airport size
- Location in Rhode Island/region
- Customer service/friendly
- Regional economic engine

WEAKNESSES

Relationship with Host Community

- Reduction of quality of life in the host community due to aircraft noise, air pollution and congestion on surface roads (Airport and Post Roads)
- Location amid and proximity to dense residential, commercial and other urban development
- Inadequate compensation for the host community
- Name recognition (T. F. Green is not known nationally; PVD is Providence, but aircraft land in Warwick)
- Lack of public transportation to/from the airport
- Political use of airport “issue” hinders relationship-building

Air Service Limitations

- Lack of non-stop service to long haul destinations (west coast)
- Inadequate frequency and diversity of non-stop service to non-hub destinations
- Lack of international service

OPPORTUNITIES

Improve Relationship with Host Community

- Develop and implement new measures to reduce noise, improve air quality and relieve surface road congestion
- Coordinate future planning with the host community
- Evaluate current and potential revenue generation for the host community
- Enhance intermodal transportation. Integrate train station/airport link and include other forms of public transportation

Improve Air Service

- Increase the frequency and diversity of markets served non-stop to non-hub and long-haul locations (west coast)
- Increase frequency of shuttle-type service to short-haul business/financial centers
- Attract/introduce scheduled or chartered international service
- Attract/increase cargo throughput
- Market PVD regionally to attract users and nationally to enhance name recognition.
- Serve niche in regional airport system

CONSTRAINTS

Constraints to Air Service

- Existing runway lengths limit the range and diversity of service
- Limited airfield pavement for overnight parking, and “grandfathered” runway safety areas do not maximize safety and efficiency for aircraft maneuvering
- Existing terminal currently operates at/near capacity during peak travel periods. As passenger throughput increases, convenience and efficiency of terminal operations will decrease
- Local access roads currently operate at/near capacity during peak periods (Post and Airport Roads)
- Existing airport land envelope is relatively small and is surrounded by dense residential and commercial land uses on all sides

Constraints to Future Safety Improvements/Modernization/Development

- Residential neighborhoods and communities
- Water, natural and cultural resources
- Host community relationship
- Federal law prohibitions and restrictions on airport revenue diversion
- Financial feasibility of future improvements

Operational Constraints

- Voluntary curfew reduces effective operating capacity

AIRPORT MASTER PLAN GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Rhode Island Airport Corporation (RIAC) is responsible for providing safe and efficient facilities to serve the needs of the traveling public. In common with the host community, RIAC must respond to the need to protect prior investment and current assets, and ensure that identified strengths are preserved and enhanced. And, if additional growth is anticipated, the airport must grow responsibly, based on identified demand for services to guarantee long-term sustenance of its strengths. Along the way, RIAC must ensure that any adverse impacts to the natural and human environment are identified and that these impacts are avoided where possible, or minimized.

With due consideration of the history and current status of the airport, the information received during the Fall 2000 charrette and community survey process, and the recognition of the responsibility for sound management of T. F. Green Airport, the following Guiding Principles for the conduct of the Airport Master Plan are adopted:

1. The Airport Master Plan will follow an open, public process. Communication of information to the general public and other constituencies will be included in the master planning process, and the process will provide opportunities for meaningful input into decision-making.
2. T. F. Green Airport's strengths should be considered an accomplishment for the state of Rhode Island and an investment to be preserved and enhanced. In this regard, T. F. Green cannot take actions that would reduce airline service or neglect maintenance or improvement of existing facilities.
3. T. F. Green must grow responsibly. Identification of air transportation demand for the next twenty years will account for changes occurring in the national and regional economy; changes occurring in the airline industry; and changes occurring in technology; each of which could affect the need for additional facilities.
4. T. F. Green Airport will evaluate whether identified future demand can be accommodated by existing facilities, or whether additional facilities are needed. The evaluation of whether future passenger demand can be accommodated by existing or additional facilities will recognize current limits of the airport boundary, as well as market-driven demands for air transportation that may result in modifying the property boundary.

5. If further growth is warranted, additional facilities may need to be developed to maintain safety, reliability, and convenience for the air traveler. T. F. Green will respond to the needs to manage environmental impacts, integrate airport planning with the planning efforts of the cities of Warwick and Cranston, and evaluate current and potential revenue generation to the City of Warwick for the various impacts of the airport.
6. Funding for facilities at T. F. Green Airport will continue to be provided by airport users and the Federal Aviation Administration and without subsidy by the Rhode Island taxpayer.
7. An environmental impact evaluation of recommended short-term master plan improvements will be conducted prior to development of additional facilities beyond that of previously approved master plans, capital programs, and other studies. As required by the federal environmental process, “no action” alternatives and least impacting environmental alternatives will be explored.

As the Master Plan process evolves, these Guiding Principles can be used to test whether information and evaluations are supportive of and consistent with comments and concerns identified in the early input meetings (charrettes).

MEETING THE OBJECTIVES OF THE AIRPORT MASTER PLAN

A primary objective of the master planning process is to find and communicate the information necessary to support further evaluation of identified *strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and constraints* of T. F. Green, and to directly support the Guiding Principles of the Airport Master Plan. Therefore, the Scope of Services provided by the study consultant must reflect this objective. The following summarizes efforts that will be taken to meet the objectives of each Guiding Principle of the Airport Master Plan:

GUIDING PRINCIPLE #1: The Airport Master Plan will follow an open, public process. Communication of information to the general public and other constituencies will be included into the master planning process, and the process will provide opportunities for meaningful input into decision-making.

- Assemble “Study Resource Committee” to receive and review information
- Hold public workshops and hearings at appropriate stages of the Master Plan process
- Develop website for broader and timely access to information obtained for the Master Plan

GUIDING PRINCIPLE #2: T. F. Green Airport’s strengths should be considered an accomplishment for the state of Rhode Island and an investment to be preserved and enhanced. In this regard, T. F. Green cannot take actions that would reduce airline service or neglect maintenance or improvement of existing facilities.

- Undertake an inventory of existing airport facilities and environs
- Undertake an assessment of current airline service and the market area of T. F. Green Airport
- Evaluate the extent and status of the current local and regional economy
- Ensure that RIAC capital budgeting allows for maintenance and improvement of existing facilities

GUIDING PRINCIPLE #3: T. F. Green must grow responsibly. Identification of air transportation demand for the next twenty years will account for changes occurring in the national and regional economy; changes occurring in the airline industry; and changes occurring in technology; each of which could affect the need for additional facilities.

- Assemble current and projected economic trends for Rhode Island and the southern New England region
- Assess trends of the airline industry, such as mergers and aircraft fleet changes
- Assess market demand of T. F. Green to current and alternate destinations
- Consider the effects of an intermodal link between the airport and the Warwick train station on passenger projections and facility needs

GUIDING PRINCIPLE #4: T. F. Green Airport will evaluate whether identified future demand can be accommodated by existing facilities, or whether additional facilities are needed. The evaluation of whether future passenger demand can be accommodated by existing or additional facilities will recognize current limits of the airport boundary, as well as market-driven demands for air transportation that may result in modifying the property boundary.

- Two forecasts will be prepared – one based on existing facility capacities assuming no expansion of the current property, and one based on market-driven information, such as desired destinations and the region’s economic and airline service trends and needs

GUIDING PRINCIPLE #5: If further growth is warranted, additional facilities may need to be developed to maintain safety, reliability, and convenience for the air traveler. T. F. Green will respond to the needs to manage environmental impacts, integrate airport planning with the planning efforts of the cities of Warwick and Cranston, and to evaluate current and potential revenue generation to the City of Warwick for the various impacts of the airport.

- Evaluate runway lengths, safety areas, and pavement envelope to maintain safe aircraft operating environment
- Evaluate need for additional terminal and landside facilities
- Evaluate alternatives to additional facility development at T. F. Green

- Evaluate ways to avoid or minimize the effects of the airport on the natural and human environment
- Implement measures adopted in recent Airport Part 150 Noise and Land Use Compatibility Study regarding joint airport and City planning efforts, as well as the City’s adopted Resolution for establishment of an Airport Land Use Commission
- Prepare Fiscal Impact Evaluation of current and potential revenue generation to the City for impacts of hosting T. F. Green Airport

GUIDING PRINCIPLE #6: Funding for facilities at T. F. Green Airport will continue to be provided by airport users and the Federal Aviation Administration and without subsidy by the Rhode Island taxpayer.

- Prepare an airport financial plan that takes into account ability to pay for existing and potential capital improvements in a fiscally sound manner
- Ensure that the airport’s capital improvement program requires only airport user and Federal Aviation Administration funding, and does not require funding by Rhode Island taxpayers

GUIDING PRINCIPLE #7: An environmental impact evaluation of recommended short-term master plan will be conducted prior to development of additional facilities beyond that of previously approved master plans and other studies. As required by the federal environmental process, “no action” alternatives and least impacting environmental alternatives will be explored.

- Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement according to National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) standards to include evaluation of cumulative impacts of T. F. Green Airport Master Plan facility recommendations
- Include the rehabilitation of Runway 16-34 pavement, and the potential extension of Runway 16-34 (as recommended in the approved Part 150 Study) in the environmental impact statement process
- Consider environmental impacts of “No Action” and “Least Impacting” Alternatives