

NOME AIRPORT RUNWAY SAFETY AREA EXPANSION - PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE #2

June 2, 2010

5:00 P.M. – 7:00 P.M.

Old Saint Joseph's Church, Nome, AK

Meeting Summary:

The second Public Open House meeting covered both the Nome Airport Master Plan project and the Runway Safety Area Expansion project. DOT&PF representatives in attendance were RJ Stumpf, Janet Brown, Jeff Roach, and Ivet Hall. The FAA was represented by Pat Oien, Matt Freeman, and Bruce Greenwood. USKH Inc. was represented by Sara Lindberg, Hans Arnett, and Cindy Anderson. Royce Conlon and Patrick Cotter represented PDC Engineers, and Anne Brooks represented Brooks & Associates. Project presentations were made at 5:30 p.m.

RJ Stumpf, DOT&PF Project Manager, welcomed the public and thanked them for attending the second public meeting. He then introduced his staff, both project teams, and the FAA staff. He provided background on the importance of planning for the future and the current need to improve the Runway Safety Areas (RSA). He introduced PDC Project engineer Patrick Cotter for the first presentation on the Master Plan. The RSA Expansion project and potential Snake River Relocation Options were presented by Hans Arnett. Cindy Anderson of USKH spoke about the ongoing NEPA process for the project. Sara Lindberg of USKH was also in attendance. After the presentations, questions were answered in a group format. As time permitted, DOT&PF and project representatives discussed the projects and answered questions individually. Meeting attendees are identified on the attached sign-in sheets.

Hans Arnett, USKH Hydrologist, presented an overview of the Snake River Relocation portion of the Runway Safety Area Expansion project:

- In 1942, the airport was built on dredge tailings that date back to mining done in the 1930s. Because of the mining activities, the 1942 photo probably displays at least the second major relocation of the river.
- By 1950, the crosswind runway was extended to essentially its present location. The river was moved further south in a very narrow channel, and a lake present to the south of the southern end of the runway had been filled.
- In 1962, dredge mining was occurring in the river to the west of the airport, resulting in minor modifications to the Snake River channel.
- By 1986, the Snake River was in essentially the same configuration as it is today, with the exception of the river mouth. Dredge mining had moved up onto the hillside to the south and away from the river by that point. Also notable in the 1986 photography is that the westernmost of the two breakwaters that currently protect the port had been constructed.
- The last big change on the Snake River has been the construction of the new river mouth as part of the improvements at the port. Construction of the new mouth was completed in 2005.

- Last fall and early winter, two river relocation options were developed for achieving full safety area compliance. Both options were developed to accommodate:
 - Expansion of the main runway to 10,000 feet, with a full 500-foot wide safety area extending 1,000 feet beyond each threshold;
 - Construction of a parallel taxiway on the south side of the main runway, running the full length of the expanded runway; and
 - Expansion of the crosswind runway safety areas to a full 500-foot width, extending 1,000 feet beyond each threshold.
- The first relocation option was called the Lower River Reconnection option and the other was called the New River Mouth option.
- All of the river relocation options have some features in common:
 - All involve excavation to produce a new river valley and floodplain;
 - All require additional excavation to build a new channel in the bottom of the new valley; and
 - Large volumes of excavation are produced and need to be disposed of. Therefore, disposal of excavated material is an important feature of all the relocation options.
- **Lower River Reconnection Option**
 - The key feature of this option is that it maintains hydraulic connectivity with the lower river.
 - The new valley and channel takes off at approximately River Mile 3.7, cuts due south to skirt the end of the proposed 10,000-foot runway, and then the river would meander gently within a relatively straight new valley, to rejoin the existing river channel just upstream of the south end of the crosswind runway.
 - To accommodate the expansion of the safety area of the crosswind runway, a new valley and channel would be routed into the mining pit pond and back out the other side to rejoin the existing channel.
 - This option would be more than 15,000 feet long and would generate almost 6 million cubic yards of excavation.
 - Most of this excavation would be placed in a disposal area, which would be surrounded by a protective berm, and would have a series of settling ponds to collect sediment from melt water coming out of the thawing permafrost.
 - A portion of the excavated material would be placed in the dewatered segment of the channel.
- **New River Mouth Option**
 - The key feature of this option is that it has a significantly shorter channel that leads to a new river mouth and estuary along the Norton Sound coast, about 2 ½ miles west of the current mouth. The channel of this option is about 6,400 feet long, which is about 9,000 feet shorter than the Lower River Reconnection Option.
 - This option takes off at the same spot as the Lower River Reconnection option at approximately River Mile 3.7, and then snakes to the south, taking advantage of lower

elevation terrain before cutting through the high point of the ridge and taking a bend to form a new estuary near the coast.

- Having a new river mouth would disrupt normal access along the beach, so this option includes a bridge with access roads on either side to maintain access.
 - Excavated material would be placed in a disposal area and in the dewatered channel.
 - Less excavation is generated with this option - only 3.7 million cubic yards compared to 5.9 million for the Lower River Reconnection Option.
 - Even though the New River Mouth option is much shorter and has significantly less excavation, it is also much steeper which produces hydraulic concerns about channel stability. The cost estimate therefore includes hydraulic control structures and channel lining to prevent the new channel from head-cutting back up into the natural river.
 - Once costs are added for channel lining and hydraulic control structures, and for the 400-foot-long bridge and access roads, the costs of the two options start to get closer together.
- Before costs were known and while the concept designs were still being developed, both designs were presented to a Multi-Agency Task Force in October 2009.
 - The group was formed of the DOT&PF, FAA, USKH design and environmental teams, and agencies including the Department of Fish and Game, Department of Environmental Conservation, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, and the National Marine Fisheries Service.
 - The goal of the group was to form a consensus on design that would create a feasible and permittable Snake River relocation option.
 - After the presentation, the Task Force went on a field visit to the project site, and then comments and discussions were documented.
 - After all of this, the two concept designs were completed, and it was discovered that the costs of the two alternatives were similar and very high at more than \$70 million for each.
 - These costs are well outside the FAA funding limits for RSA expansion.
 - Money from that particular FAA funding source can only be directed toward addressing RSA issues, and the first two alternatives that were developed addressed lengthening the main runway to 10,000 feet and construction of a parallel taxiway.
 - To address the FAA funding limitations, a third, lower-cost river relocation option was developed. This third option is called Option 3.
 - **Option 3:**
 - Addresses full expansion of the main runway safety area 1,000 feet to the west beyond Threshold 10;
 - Full safety area expansion of 1,000 feet to the east beyond Threshold 28 with the last 600 feet narrowed; and
 - Allowance for a future 1,500-foot expansion of the main runway to achieve an eventual total runway length of 7,500 feet, which is the length that the Master Planning process has determined is needed in the next 20 years at the airport.

- Option 3 does not require relocation around the southern end of the crosswind runway to address RSA needs.
- Option 3 takes off from the existing river at approximately River Mile 3.2 (half a mile further downstream than the earlier two options) and is routed through a 5,500-foot long new valley to a reconnection point just downstream of the west end of the main runway.
- There is less excavation required with this option (about 1.6 million cubic yards) and consequently, the disposal area is much smaller.
- The cost estimate for Option 3 is roughly \$27 million.
- Geotechnical studies are currently underway. Test holes have been drilled over the past several weeks. The results of these studies will help the DOT&PF to decide whether Option 3 or the No-Build alternative is the preferred alternative for RSA expansion.
- Hazardous Materials studies are also underway, with field work scheduled for this summer. These studies are necessary because the alignment of the relocation goes through some previously mined areas where there are a lot of discarded barrels with questionable substances in them. This is all being coordinated with ADEC.

Cindy Anderson, USKH Environmental Analyst, continued with the following points regarding the NEPA process:

- The DOT&PF's and FAA's goal is to provide the most effective solution for achieving full safety area compliance and provide opportunities for lower approach minimums and greater accessibility to the Nome Airport. This public meeting is being held to help make the public part of the process.
- The end result of the environmental process for this project will be a NEPA document that analyzes the impact to the human environment, including natural resources such as water, fish, wildlife, subsistence, access, land use, and others. The decision document will likely be an Environmental Assessment.
- The goal of the NEPA document is to identify a preferred alternative for improving safety areas at the Nome Airport that finds a balance between community needs, economics, and environmental impacts.
- Currently, the process is at the data gathering stage. The environmental review process began in 2009 with a public meeting, informal agency consultation to discuss the Snake River relocation (MATF), and data gathering, which is ongoing.
- To date, preliminary hydrology and wetland studies have been completed. Cultural surveys, geotechnical studies, and hazardous materials studies are ongoing.
- More data will be gathered to analyze the impacts of the proposed action. This process will continue through this year.
- This meeting is being held today to gather public input. There will be additional opportunities for comment when the draft NEPA document is published. Public input is an important part of the process.
- Once the environmental document has been completed, it will go to the FAA for review.
- The anticipated timeline for this project is to have the environmental document completed in early 2011 and construction completed by 2015.

- Public comments help to guide the process. Comments received to date have expressed concerns about contaminated soils, property access, construction in permafrost, reductions in freshwater flow to the harbor, impacts to property values, and others. All of these comments are helpful in the design of practicable alternatives and the development of useful investigations to examine impacts.

Questions regarding the Runway Safety Area Expansion and the River Relocation Options included:

- *What about putting a bridge over the river that the runway would go over? Was that analyzed and cost-estimated?*
 - *Answer:* The bridge option had been reviewed, and the costs to build a bridge are prohibitive.
- *Does the cost of the relocation also include the cost of rerouting roads?*
 - *Answer:* Yes, these costs will be included when the costs are developed.
- *If river relocation doesn't work, where would the mitigation funding come from?*
 - *Answer:* A monitoring plan would be funded within the project. The project would also include an adaptive management plan.
- *The west end of the runway is sinking. Is it caused by the river?*
 - *Answer:* No. It is caused by the fact that the runway was built on old, unstable placer mining spoils.
- *Why would you do something twice? Why not just do it right now?*
 - *Answer:* Part of the reason is funding, and part of it is the Congressional mandate. We may not be able to do a full 7,500-foot runway now, but we'll do as much as we can with \$25 million per runway. If a full RSA cannot be completed, a non-standard RSA can be completed. The RSA is required for the Boeing 400 series aircraft operating in and out of Nome. It will be improved to the extent practicable by 2015, which is necessary for the airport to continue receiving jets.
- *Alaska Airlines does not feel [the RSA] is an issue for their planes.*
 - *Response:* The length of the RSA is not the only factor, but location is a safety issue, too.
- *How is \$200 million divvied up? Who decides? Is it a STIP process, like for roads?*
 - *Answer:* Projects are nominated for improvements and put before a project evaluation board called the APEB (Aviation Project Evaluation Board). They allocate funding based on 16 criteria used to score the projects. Cost is only one of the criteria. Then the decision is put before the FAA. They use the list to allocate the FAA funding and any discretionary funding that becomes available. The FAA is open to what the public wants, but it still needs to be a reasonable alternative. The process is approved by the State of Alaska.
- *How do we get nomination forms?*
 - *Answer:* These forms are available from the DOT&PF web site. You may also make nominations by contacting the airport manager or area planner.
- *It seems like there are two separate issues here. One is the RSA expansion, which the FAA needs to complete. The other is the Master Plan Update. Doesn't the RSA drive the direction of the 20-*

year plan? It seems like you should move the East-West runway to the north and accommodate the needed runway safety area on the new runway.

- *Answer:* While this is how it looks on the surface, the FAA's mandate is to complete RSA expansions by 2015. Thirty airports are finished so far, which is about half of the number that need RSA expansions. Money is available now for the RSA expansion, but not for runway relocation. The FAA works with DOT&PF to accommodate the RSA expansions to the best extent possible. Sometimes it is not possible to create a full RSA, but any improvement that makes the runway safer for the traveling public is the goal of the program.
- *What if the RSA is constructed as drawn? Would that drive the Master Plan process?*
 - *Answer:* The 20-year plan includes a much broader level of improvements. RSA improvements are mandated by Congress. What we are reviewing now are RSA projects to be completed within the next 5 years.
- *If you re-route the Snake River, wouldn't that eliminate some of the Master Plan projects?*
 - *Answer:* There would be some projects eliminated, yes. If we spend more money now, there would be additional benefits when you look 20 years into the future and beyond.

General comments regarding the Runway Safety Area expansion and potential Snake River relocation options included:

- Thanks for not moving the river.
- I'm concerned with the flow decrease, siltation, and the sloughing in of the sides of the valley.
- When we look at options including a new east-west runway, it puts it out of the market for RSA improvement grant money.
- The Master Plan should take place after the RSA project.
- RSA improvements are to the extent practicable. No-Build is a valid option.
- How much consideration is given to the size and growth of the city? For example, with the new hospital... it seems that the money spent on extending the runway could be spent on relocating the runway to the north, giving Nome area to expand. Look at Merrill Field in Anchorage—it has nowhere to go.
- People [project designers] don't live here, and don't realize that [residents] get stuck in Anchorage during airport construction.
- The smaller river relocation would not account for expansion beyond the 20-year mark.
- Don't put money into the existing runway. It's not a good investment. Spend the money going north.
- The west end of the runway gets torn up every five years. If you extend the runway over the river channel, you will continue to have problems with settlement and increase the cost of maintenance.
- Moving the river won't solve existing problems. We will continue to have problems with settling by constructing over [mined areas]. It would be better to move the runway north.

- The west end of the east-west runway continues to sink and would continue even if the Snake River is relocated.
- New floodplain laws will require the runways to go above the floodplain.
- The No-Build alternative has never been selected for an RSA expansion project in Alaska.
- We need to look at other considerations. We need to relocate.
- It seems like we should spend State and FAA money working towards a goal of moving the airport. Spend the money in the right direction.
- The current location has issues like sinking, fog, and obstructions. We should look at relocating.
- It sounds like the runway is unsafe and the directive to improve it within 5 years as long as it doesn't cost too much. The project seems to have an arbitrary spending cap. It's better to identify the best solution and go back to congress and get more money.
- Moving the runway north is the best solution.
- Making the runway longer doesn't necessarily make it better for Nome.
- The FAA's total fund for Alaska for 2008 was \$200 million, total. Nome is one of 200 airports in Alaska. The money has to go a long way. But do we spend all the money in Nome and forget about other communities?

Written comments regarding the Runway Safety Area Expansion and the Snake River Relocation

Options included:

- Plan looks good.
- This and the bottom one are better than your original ideas—less impact on the river, and us [referencing Shifted Primary, Shifted Crosswind, New GA and New Primary Shifted Crosswind, respectively]. Cons: Moves river. The river has been messed with enough - mouth moved a few years ago, channel by primary must have been modified in the past. This is still a living river—we fish and boat there. People camp upriver.
- [Referencing New Primary and Shifted Crosswind] Preferred. If you are going to skew the Primary a bit, why not the other way, starting near the present runway. Pros: Doesn't move river. Cons: New primary far from terminals.
- [Referencing Shifted Primary & Realigned Crosswind] Pros: Stays off road. Cons: Moves river.