



City of Tacoma

Mayor Victoria Woodards

September 15, 2020

Washington State Department of Transportation Aviation Division
P.O. Box 47361
Olympia, WA 98504

To the Members of the Commercial Aviation Coordinating Commission,

Thank you for the work you are doing to identify locations for a new commercial aviation facility in our state. The City Council recognizes the need for additional capacity to accommodate our state's growing population and economy. We support the work of the Commercial Aviation Coordinating Commission (CACC) and the process as outlined in Senate Bill 5370.

The CACC is charged with recommending six locations by January 2021, the top two locations by September 2021, and a single preferred location for a new commercial aviation facility by January 2022. As we understand, McChord Airfield is still on the short list as a potential location for a new commercial aviation facility. We are writing today to note that this location does not meet the criteria outlined in statute and to share some of our concerns with it remaining on the short list.

The authorizing legislation for the CACC's work, Senate Bill 5370, states that, "options for a new primary commercial aviation facility in Washington may include expansion of an existing airport facility but may not include siting a facility on or in the vicinity of a military installation that would be incompatible with the installation's ability to carry out its mission requirements." According to the installation, airspace in the vicinity of Joint Base Lewis McChord (JBLM) is already limited and any commercial flights would hamper the installation's ability to conduct necessary training missions and deployment readiness. Co-locating a commercial aviation facility at McChord Airfield would detrimentally impact our national security and our state's economy.

As you may know, Joint Base Lewis McChord is a major economic engine in the South Sound. The installation is the fourth largest employer in the state and the largest in Pierce County. The 2020 Regional Economic Impact Analysis conducted by the University of Washington- Tacoma Center for Business Analytics calculated the gross economic output of JBLM in Pierce and

Thurston Counties as \$12.1 billion and \$13.9 billion statewide. Any limitation on the mission capacity at JBLM threatens this economic impact.

It is worth noting that Congressman Denny Heck has been vocally opposed to McChord Field as a potential location. In a 2019 Tacoma News Tribune Op-Ed, Congressman Heck stated, “While that [McChord Field] may seem like a good idea on the surface, it is a deeply flawed plan that should be rejected out of hand.” He went on to say, “Any delays, incursions or restrictions that affect mission readiness and tempo would be incompatible with modern national-security needs and an unjustifiable burden on our service members stationed around the globe.”

If McChord Airfield does advance as a recommendation, there are challenges related to the McChord Field North Clear Zone (NCZ), also referred to as a Runway Protection Zone (RPZ). The installation has been working with local partners for several years to relocate businesses that are currently in the McChord NCZ and bring the properties into compliance. However, this process is still ongoing and may take many more years to resolve.

While we recognize the desire to locate a new commercial aviation facility near population centers so as to divert passengers and cargo from SeaTac International Airport, the traffic congestion that has plagued the South Sound region for decades is bound to be an impediment for prospective travelers. Advancing McChord Field as an option will require addressing complex transportation challenges that will otherwise limit airport access.

The City Council is also highly concerned about the potential environmental impacts on our community that would result from having a major commercial air traffic hub so close to a densely populated area. Air pollution resulting from increased freeway traffic and aircraft traveling to and from McChord Airfield raises the risk of rising greenhouse gas emissions and particulate matter in our air. This is especially worrisome for our neighborhoods in the eastern and southern parts of Tacoma, which already experience disparate health outcomes compared to other areas of the city. From a health equity perspective, we cannot support the siting of a primary commercial airport so close to our community.

No matter which location is ultimately advanced, we encourage the CACC to consider the impacts a new airport facility will have on the surrounding communities. Impacts such as approaching/departing aircraft noise, wear and tear of local road networks due to increase in traffic volumes, additional law enforcement, reduced air quality, and other such concerns will need to be mitigated.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns and for your work on this important topic.

Yours in service,