

STUDY OF COUNTY AIRPORTS

INTRODUCTION

The Audit, Finance and County Administration Committee decided to study the Ventura County Department of Airports' (Airport) policies and procedures relating to operations at the Camarillo and Oxnard Airports. This study was to examine the Airports' master plan, noise compatibility and land use policies as they concern the airports and surrounding communities. In our early discussions, we were introduced to the subject of airport privatization.

INQUIRY

We met with the County Director of Airports (Director) and his staff. We were provided with, and reviewed, numerous documents about the airports. Several more visits and meetings were held with airport officials at which time discussions became centered on airport public/privatization plans, possible Navy-civilian use of Point Mugu and development of non-aeronautical interests at Camarillo and Oxnard airports. We attended a public meeting of the Camarillo and Oxnard Airport Authorities. We also met with the spokesperson of the Aviation Advisory Committee and spoke with representatives of the consulting firm which prepared a report on public/private partnerships of airports.

FINDINGS

The Camarillo and Oxnard Airport Authorities were established in 1976 and 1980 under the provisions of a Joint Powers Agreement between the County of Ventura and the two cities. Their function is direct airport development through a review/recommendation process on policy matters relative to those facilities. An additional function is to review all land use changes within an area near the airport to ensure that incompatible land uses do not occur.

The Point Mugu Regional Authority was established in 1995 between the County of Ventura and the cities of Oxnard, Port Hueneme, Ventura and Thousand Oaks. Its function is for planning, development, operation and management of a possible civilian airport in conjunction with military aviation at Naval Air Weapons Station, Point Mugu.

The Airport properties comprise 216 acres in Oxnard with a 5,950' by 100' runway. Camarillo has 670 acres with a 6,010' by 100' runway. There are parallel taxiways with connectors and access to all air cargo hangar facilities. There is a full-time Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) operated control tower in Camarillo.

Camarillo is one the busiest and largest general aviation facilities in California. It has 292 hangars with 580 based aircraft and 190,080

aircraft operations (takeoffs and landings) a year (1994). Oxnard Airport has 53 county-owned and 70 privately owned hangars. It schedules 15 daily commuter flights and per year, it has 130,000 aircraft operations.

In the last half of 1997, the Department of Transportation designated the FAA to allow local airport jurisdictions the opportunity to file a pre-application to be eligible for a grant for the specific purpose of privatization. This grant stipulated that any airport which received the grant must continue to operate as an airport and abide by the FAA rules and regulations set forth in the grant. However, privatized airports would be allowed to divert revenue for non-aviation purposes such as industrial and commercial development.

Due to the short time allotted to complete the grant pre-application, the Director was ordered by the County Administrative Officer to expedite this matter. The Director then hired an outside consulting firm to meet the deadline, which was within his authority.

The Camarillo and Oxnard Airport Authorities held a public hearing for the purpose of presenting the privatization plan. The majority of attendees opposed the plan. Many of these citizens were airport users. As a result, the Airport Authorities withdrew the grant pre-application. The work already done for the grant may be used at some future time if the Board of Supervisors reconsiders privatization.

CONCLUSIONS

Both airports are attractive facilities with the potential for enhancing aviation, support services and industrial/commercial revenues. Industrial and commercial development is possible for lands on and adjacent to the airports.

Airport partnerships are not new nor are they experimental. The techniques of creating and operating them are well established. Benefits to the airports and their communities have been demonstrated in many other areas.

Private sector involvement provides a way to infuse capital, manage costs and improve the quality and range of aviation services offered. The infusion of capital allows cities to rehabilitate neglected facilities and expand and modernize to meet projected needs.

The public/private partnership can provide funds through initial payments to the County by the private partners and through increased tax revenues. Profit incentives encourage the operator to increase marketing, explore new areas of aviation and non-aviation income generation for the facility and improve the quality of customer service.

Commute times to LAX and Burbank airports are becoming longer and more costly. General aviation and commercial activity are on the increase and convenience and accessibility is a key ingredient for economic growth in Ventura County.

Public/private partnerships can benefit the County and its citizens by being a catalyst for development of underutilized and new facilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That a task force be appointed by the Board of Supervisors to study and develop recommendations for airport privatization.

That a program to educate and inform the public, airport users and surrounding communities be established.

That a realistic timetable for these efforts be established so that an informed decision can be made about airport privatization.

RESPONSES REQUIRED

Board of Supervisors

Department of Airports