

## Executive Summary

# ROLE OF THE AIRPORT/STRATEGIC ANALYSIS

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### Preface

This chapter of the master plan analyzes the feasibility of alternative roles for Hillsboro Airport within the context of the local, state, and national system of airports. This analysis provides a foundation for the Port of Portland to determine, specifically and ideally, what Hillsboro Airport's role should be through 2036. The defined role will form the basis for the determination of aviation demand (Chapter Three) and facility requirements (Chapter Four) for the Airport through 2036.

The role of an airport can change over time. For example, as aviation demand grows in a region, an airport could transition from a non-commercial service facility (i.e., general aviation) to a commercial service facility.

### Current Role

On the federal level, the National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS) identifies a current and future role for each of the 3,332 existing public use airports in the report. Airports are classified as either primary (i.e., commercial service) or non-primary (limited or no commercial service). There are 382 primary airports, which means they have scheduled passenger boardings of greater than 10,000 annually, and 2,950 non-primary airports. Non-primary airports are further classified as general aviation (2,564), general aviation reliever (259), and general aviation non-primary commercial service (127), which means they have passenger boardings between 2,500-9,999. Hillsboro Airport is currently classified as a general aviation reliever airport.

General aviation reliever airports serve a vital function in the national aviation system. They are located in more populated areas and are planned and designed to attract general aviation activity that might

otherwise use more congested commercial service airports. The two reliever airports in the region, Hillsboro and Troutdale, combine to meet this need, with Hillsboro being more capable of accommodating larger general aviation aircraft (i.e., business jets). Hillsboro meets its current role.

**Future Role Possibilities**

An in-depth analysis has been undertaken to determine if another, more comprehensive, role for the Airport is necessary and feasible. Each of the potential roles for the Airport builds upon its current role as a general aviation reliever facility by introducing commercial and/or air cargo service. The following four potential roles for the Airport were considered:

- General Aviation/Reliever
- General Aviation/Reliever/Commuter Service with less than 10 passenger-seat aircraft.
- General Aviation/Reliever/Commercial Service
- General Aviation/Reliever/Air Cargo

**Commercial Service Potential**

As aviation demand grows in a community or region, the need for a secondary commercial service airport should be considered. An in-depth analysis of those U.S. cities with viable secondary commercial service airports was undertaken. Most of those cities have a much larger population than Portland and are, thus, not readily comparable to the Portland area. Three were identified that have a similar population base to Portland: Las Vegas, Orlando, and Tampa. Each of these cities has a major tourist attraction and at least twice the number of total visitors annually as Portland.

A case study of Seattle was also undertaken as Paine Field in Everett, north of Seattle, is about to initiate new commercial service. They have commitments from both Alaska and United Airlines to provide service beginning in 2018, when construction of a new terminal building is expected to be complete. Seattle had 40.3 million flying passengers in 2015 compared to Portland’s 16.7 million. The table below shows the relevant data for these cities.

<b>Comparable Cities with Secondary Commercial Airports</b>			
<b>City</b>	<b>2016 MSA Population</b>	<b>2016 Visitor Base</b>	<b>2015 Passengers</b>
Las Vegas	2,138,330	43 million	44.8 million
Orlando	2,403,021	66 million	39.9 million
Tampa	2,990,492	22 million	19.9 million
Seattle*	3,765,621	38 million	40.3 million
Portland	2,411,688	9 million	16.7 million

\*Beginning in 2018

Portland outperforms the other cities in term of flying passengers based on population. However, the other cities have major tourist attractions and a visitor base that is much higher than Portland. Seattle may be the best comparable as they are preparing to launch commercial service at a secondary airport.

Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that Portland would need to at least double the number of flying passengers before commercial service at a secondary airport would become viable. PDX is not forecast to double in passengers within the 20-year planning horizon of this master plan.

Additional analysis was conducted to examine the current capability of Hillsboro to accommodate commercial service. There are several limiting factors, including runway length, runway strength, terminal facilities, parking facilities, and roadway access. In addition, Hillsboro Airport would have to meet the federal requirements for a commercial operating certificate, which includes passenger screening (TSA), security, firefighting, and numerous other regulations. Nonetheless, Hillsboro is certainly the most capable of the six (6) other airports in the region that are included in the NPIAS. The jump to commercial service would be somewhat easier for Hillsboro than any of those six.

One aspect of commercial service that is possible at Hillsboro is from a carrier utilizing an aircraft with less than 10 passenger seats. Aircraft of this type can and do currently operate at the airport, although not in a commercial capacity. This type of service does not require the Airport to have an airport operating certificate. Thus, passenger screening and a variety of other regulatory requirements do not apply. Most of these small commercial carriers benefit from federal subsidy programs for which Hillsboro is not eligible. While technically feasible, there has been no interest from these small aircraft commercial carriers to begin service at Hillsboro.

### **Air Cargo Potential**

There is only a limited opportunity for air cargo services at Hillsboro Airport currently. This is a function of the structure of the air cargo industry, type of aircraft used for air cargo services, and the current role of the Airport. Current regulations limit the air cargo capacity for non-certificated airports, such as Hillsboro, to 7,500 pounds per aircraft. To permit larger air cargo capacity, the Airport would have to have a commercial operating certificate and significant infrastructure improvements.

Air cargo facilities are centrally located at major airports that have the infrastructure to support their operations. This includes the infrastructure to accommodate the truck delivery aspect of air cargo. PDX serves this role in the region currently. Feeder air cargo service utilizing small aircraft is feasible, however, the air cargo business model relies on truck delivery over hundreds of miles. The importance of the trucking aspect of air cargo cannot be overstated. Discussions with the air cargo carriers indicated that feeder service from Hillsboro to PDX would not be cost-effective as compared to traditional trucking of cargo.

### **Future Role Conclusion**

During the 20-year scope of this master plan, a secondary commercial service airport in the Portland region is not anticipated to be needed based on demand. Therefore, traditional commercial passenger service at Hillsboro Airport is not considered feasible currently. Air cargo service is also not considered feasible at this time. The most viable future role for the Hillsboro Airport is to continue its current role as a general aviation reliever airport. Since airport master plans are typically updated every 10 years, the future role of Hillsboro Airport should be addressed again at that time.