

Paine Field Mediated Role Determination

The Paine Field Mediated Role Determination is actually a combination of documents that have not been neatly condensed into one. This has been a factor in occasional misinterpretations and misrepresentations of the documents content or intent. An additional factor in this confusion is misunderstanding of definitions of specific aviation terms. The purpose of this brief summary is to identify the various documents including reference to key elements of each in a historic context and reference definitions of specific aviation terms as published in federal law.

The process of determining a role for the airport actually began in 1973 when Snohomish County began a Conceptual Development and Environmental Study. This study presented general conclusions and recommendations on five airport development concepts, ranging from major air carrier to status quo roles but never finalized the role selection element due to a number of issues including funding constraints.

The County pursued additional federal grant funding in 1977 and again addressed the subject in a study called the Paine Field Community Plan (PFCP). This PFCP was an initial element of the Master Plan for Paine Field which was ultimately adopted in 1981. The PFCP reviewed four alternative long range roles for the airport labeled: Do Nothing (DN), Major General Aviation (MGA), Satellite Air Carrier / Major General Aviation (SAC / MGA), and Revised General Aviation (RGA). Eleven (11) pages of tables labeled figure 6 in the 12-15-77 PFCP Draft Environmental Analysis Summary summarized the aeronautical activity components of each alternative role including # of operations, passengers, and freight during three years (1976, 1985 and 1995) of the study horizon. At numerous public meetings and hearings interested parties voiced their concerns and preferences to the Everett Planning Commission, Everett City Council, Snohomish County Airport Commission, Snohomish County Planning Commission and ultimately to the County Commissioners.

On April 11, 1978 the Snohomish County Commission chose a role recommended by the County Planning Commission titled "General Aviation" which was a combination of the "Revised General Aviation" and "Do Nothing" roles as presented in the PFCP. The objective of this "General Aviation" role was to retain and enhance light aircraft general aviation as the dominant aeronautical activity at the airport. Other aviation activities that would be encouraged to continue and expand included aircraft related industries, business and corporate aviation, public service service aviation and air taxi service. Existing aviation activities that would be strongly discouraged from expanding include supplemental / charter air passenger service, large transport crew training operations, air cargo aviation, and military aviation. The seven (7) page resolution included a number of other sections including provision for expanding the Airport Commission to include residential and pilot representatives, creation of a permanent airport advisory council and beginning an environmental mediation process to address unresolved issues.

Three related events occurred in 1978: first in July the University of Washington Office of Environmental Mediation was contracted to facilitate a Mediation Panel, second in September the Airport published Noise Abatement Procedures, and third in November the County Commissioners adopted interim zoning for unincorporated lands around Paine Field. The Mediation Panel was composed of a cross section of governmental agencies, concerned citizens, tenants and users of the airport. As directed in the 1978 Role they addressed unresolved issues including new runway location, noise abatement program options, military aircraft noise, land use compatibility and alternative uses for the Bomarc property during 6 months of negotiations before reaching consensus among themselves. They forwarded their nine (9) page recommendations (referred to by some as the Mediated Agreement) to the County Commissioners for adoption. The recommendations generally reaffirmed the 1978 role but included a number of amendments and word changes. The recommendations among other things added the words "commuter service" to the list of aviation activities that would be encouraged to continue and expand and included reference to "compliance with the covenants in deeds and grants of the US Government. They also delineated the composition and function of the Paine Field Community Council. On January 23, 1979 the Board of County Commissioners adopted the recommendations of the Mediation Panel regarding amendments to the 1978 Role. The Airport staff has since referred to the 1978 Role as amended by the

1979 Mediation Panels Recommendations as “The 1978/79 Mediated Role Determination” or simply “The Mediated Role.”

It is interesting to note that while the Role references supplemental / charter air passenger service, large transport crew training operations, air cargo aviation and military aviation as existing aviation activities which would be strongly discouraged from expanding both the Role and the Mediated Agreement don't use the terms “scheduled airline service” or “satellite air carrier” as used in the PFCP. In federal law 14CFR Part 121 SFAR 38-2 pp6 (3) supplemental air carrier regulations are defined to apply to charter and all cargo operations. Airport staff has generally assumed the intent of the documents to include scheduled passenger airline service by most large aircraft as a discouraged activity. Also it is valuable to review the “baseline” levels of the activities the role discourages from expanding. Actual data for 1978 freight and passenger activity at the airport is not readily available but the data in figure 6 of the PFCP shows that in 1975 levels of freight were 4,983 tons, and 199,670 passengers enplaned during 1976. The PFCP forecasts projected (graph) that 1978 freight would be between 6,300 - 7,100 tons due in large part to scheduled Navy Quick-Trans, Pacific Alaska Airlines and Alaska north slope oil pipeline related freight flight activity. It is interesting to note that freight tonnage in these reports did not include the Boeing customer delivery flights which normally carry some amount of spare parts, nor the occasional incoming parts arriving for Boeing by air.

The County Council has had a few opportunities to review the Role for Paine Field in the subsequent years. On 2-21-89 in motion 89-059 the Council rejected a Paine Field Task Force recommendation to allow freight with strict noise limits and instead reaffirmed the “General Aviation” role of the airport. On 3-18-92 by Joint Resolution 92-010 the County Council and County Executive reaffirmed its commitment to the 1978-79 Mediated Role Determination and opposed the PSRC's Flight Plan Projects draft final reports recommendation to begin major commercial airline service at Paine Field or Arlington.

On 9-21-94 the County Council and County Executive passed Joint Resolution 94-013 again reaffirming the County's commitment to the existing Role for Paine Field and encouraging the PSRC to exclude Paine Field from among commercial airport sites. Unfortunately none of these subsequent County Council actions created a concise restatement of all pertinent parts of the Mediated Role.

While adopting the forecasts to be used in the study to update the Airport Master Plan in 2001 the County Council in motion 01-255 added clarity to the intent of the “Mediated Role” saying “*NOW THEREFORE ON MOTION; The Snohomish County Council approves the Airport Master Plan study's Forecasts of Aviation Activity working paper and adopts the Regional Low Forecast for aviation activity at Paine Field over the next 20 years, finding that it is most consistent with the existing County policy stated in the 1978/79 Mediated Role Determination. The Council reaffirms the General Aviation Role's objective to retain and enhance light aircraft general aviation as the dominant aeronautical activity at Paine Field while encouraging the continuation and expansion of aircraft related industries, business and corporate aviation, public service aviation, air taxi and commuter service, and strongly discouraging expansion beyond 1978 levels of supplemental / charter air passenger service (per 14 CFR Part 121 SFAR 38-2 pp6), large transport crew training operations, air cargo aviation and military aviation while remaining compliant with the covenants in deeds and grants of the United States Government.*”