

# **The Airport Master Plan – what is it, why is it being done?**

*For many airport representatives, interested stakeholders and the public at large, negotiating the world of FAA requirements in relation to airport planning and design can be daunting. For those not familiar with what an Airport Master Plan is or why it is done, DOWL has prepared the following brief summary:*

## **What is an Airport Master Plan?**

Quite simply, an Airport Master Plan is a comprehensive examination of an airport facility, operation, infrastructure, forecast demands, and its current and future role within the aviation system. The plan ultimately provides a specific plan with detailed costs to move forward with future developments that will take into consideration possible FAA requirements, industry demands and local, state, and public needs. The development of an Airport Master Plan sometimes follows strict FAA guidelines and/or State or Local requirements.

## **Why is it being conducted?**

An airport that receives FAA or State money is sometime required, or strongly urged, by those agencies to complete a Master Plan updates about every ten years or so. This may be a requirement to remain eligible for federal or state funding, or to address specific issues that must be vetted prior to FAA or state involvement with some projects. The reason for this is because a Master Plan helps to ensure that local, state and federal dollars are being spent as efficiently and competently as possible. The document is heavily used by the FAA, state and local officials as one of the primary tools for project and budget planning and also provides a detailed resource of both technical and non-technical information about an airport. An up to date airport Master Plan Narrative Report, along with a current Airport Layout Plan drawing, is usually necessary for an airport or agency to program money for development.

## **How much does it cost and who pays for it?**

The cost of an airport master plan varies widely depending upon the airport, its size, its role within the system and the complexity of the plan itself. While some airports are relatively small, with slow growth, others are extremely complex, with rapidly evolving changes. In very general terms, the cost for an airport master plan usually ranges from tens of thousands of dollars for a very small, GA facilities, to well over a million for much larger airports. All or part of the cost of an Airport Master Plan is usually reimbursable by the FAA or state agencies or may be entirely conducted and paid for by those agencies.

## **What will the final product look like?**

The Master Plan provides stakeholders and interested parties with an extremely useful tool and comprehensive summary of all information developed in one single bound printed or electronic document. This summary will usually include a detailed Narrative Report as well as several technical drawings known as the Airport Layout Plan sheet set. A summary of the elements included as part of the Master Plan is described on the next page.

## Typical Elements of the Airport Master Plan

- 1) **Pre-planning / Scope** – This process involves close coordination with funding agencies, the airport and consultant to develop the specific scope for the plan, securing of funding, and process to ensure local, state and federal requirements will be met.
- 2) **Public Involvement Program** – This is a critical aspect of the process that will help validate the plan with intensive sponsor, government, stakeholder and public input. This includes the creation of an Advisory Committee to help define key issues and review alternatives, collect the necessary documentation for the plan, and develop a process and plan for public events to share and gather public input.
- 3) **Environmental Considerations** – As the plan progresses, environmental considerations will be addressed and considered throughout the process, as required or necessary for the level of plan involvement, to ensure all relevant and reasonable issues are addressed in the future, as necessary, as part of future development.
- 4) **Existing Conditions** – An inventory and summary of all relevant airport facility infrastructure and operations used to baseline future development and forecasting. This may include relevant history of the facility and developments.
- 5) **Aviation Forecasts** – Forecasts of aeronautical demand upon the facility will be addressed for 5, 10 and 20 year periods. If the FAA is involved with a master planning study, they will approve the forecast in writing.
- 6) **Facility Requirements** – An assessment of the present and future infrastructure requirements of the airport. This chapter usually relies heavily upon FAA airport standards for airports and operations, taking forecast demand levels developed as part of the study into account. Demand triggers for specific development may also be addressed.
- 7) **Alternatives Development and Evaluation** – Different alternative plans for future developments, based on various factors depending upon the level of study, will be developed. Stakeholders and AC members will assess the merits of the alternatives and a recommended development alternative will emerge from this process. This will also aid in developing the purpose and planning for subsequent environmental documents.
- 8) **Airport Layout Plan** – One of the key products of a Master Plan is a set of drawings that provide a range of information, including detailed graphic representations of existing and future airport features and developments. This set of drawings includes a specific “Airport Layout Plan” sheet that encompasses the whole facility.
- 9) **Facilities Implementation Plan** – The chapter will provide a tentative schedule with cost estimates for planning specific airport development and planning projects. This chapter is used as a funding planning tool for all appropriate agencies. The schedule of improvements may be tied to identified levels of demand that trigger the need for expansion of existing facilities.
- 10) **Other Elements** – If warranted, other specific chapters may be included depending upon their need. Financial feasibility studies are common accompaniments to Master Plan studies. FAA funding eligibility to reimburse these or other chapters varies, and the costs for those items will need to be addressed prior to the start of the plan.