
WEST VIRGINIA PUBLIC PORT AUTHORITY

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HISTORY OF THE REGIONAL AIRPORT PROCESS

The Birth of the Port Authority and Its Mission

In the late Eighties and early Nineties the West Virginia State Legislature recognized a need to improve the state's transportation infrastructure and systems. By the enactment of SB 471, the West Virginia Public Port Authority was established, empowered and duly charged with the responsibility to fulfill the unmet transportation needs of commerce and people in the state. This is to be accomplished by providing facilities, services and infrastructure as necessary to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of moving people and goods to expand the volume of West Virginia's trade with domestic and foreign markets. Additionally, the WVPPA is to promote economic development by improving the transportation facilities, services and infrastructure.

Beginning with a study sponsored by the Governor's Office of Community and Industrial Development (GOCID), three priority areas of needs were identified and form the framework of the Authority today. They are: 1) more than 400 miles of under-utilized inland waterways; 2) Unmet development of an multi-mode interface – intermodalism; 3) deficient air service and facilities with a corresponding erosion of competitive air services.

Genesis of the Regional Airport Study

The Regional Airport project was initiated in 1991-1992 case study feasibility analysis which identified the service area corridors between the state's three largest airports. The corridors between Huntington, Charleston and Parkersburg framed what became known as the "golden triangle." This triangular area represented the largest potential market of air passengers. The feasibility study evaluated the three existing airports and concluded none were suitable to meet and optimize West Virginia's air service requirements of a consolidated regional airport. Each airport was involved in this study. As a result, 43 potential sites were identified within Cabell, Jackson, Wood, Mason, Kanawha and Putnam Counties.

May 1991- The HDR and SGM Group made a presentation of their initial *Feasibility Study for the Western West Virginia Regional Airport*, which was commissioned by the

Governor's Office of Community and Industrial Development on behalf of the Public Port Authority.

This report served as an impetus for further study of a Regional Airport, and was followed by a Feasibility Study Final Report for Southwestern West Virginia and an Executive Summary, both in January of 1992. The reports concluded:

"...a new regional airport to serve southwestern West Virginia is warranted and feasible. This is based on the study's conservative projections of population, employment, and airport enplanements. Second, a new airport would capture a greater percentage of the total passenger demand."

April 1993 - West Virginians were gauged for their interest in a Regional Airport with The SGM Group's *Working Paper No. 2: West Virginia Users-Attitudinal Survey for the W.V. Department of Transportation*. The results of this study offered strong evidence of a need and desire for such a facility from the region.

Additionally, during the case study work performed by HDR and SGM Group, comparable regions to West Virginia were surveyed and the site scope and facility requirements were developed into criteria by which the 43 sites were evaluated and reduced to four prospective sites. Mount Pleasant, Mount Olive, both in Mason County and Evergreen Church and Confidence, both in Putnam County. Mount Pleasant was eventually eliminated because of noise contours which impacted the Chief Cornstalk game preserve.

List of Sites Narrowed to Three

January 1995—The Port Authority gave Kimley-Horn and Associates Notice to Proceed, thus making that organization the project's primary lead consultant to conduct detailed technical site analysis of the three final sites against established FAA criteria

December 1995—The three final sites were:

- Evergreen Church, Putnam County
- Confidence, Putnam County
- Mount Olive, Mason County

In 1994 The Putnam County Development Authority contracted the LPA Group and Economic Research Associates (ERA), in cooperation with the West Virginia Department of Transportation and West Virginia Public Port Authority.

This study is largely significant because it provided a comprehensive financial and economic benefit-risk analysis which concluded that benefits exceeded cost by approximately \$68 million for the aviation system alone. It also helped to further define the parameters of the proposed airport's service area. Analysis of the "golden triangle"

market revealed that even if a site was selected which favored Parkersburg; Wood County would only contribute 15% of the facility's passengers. Parkersburg's proximity to Columbus would still create considerable leakage from that city's immediate area. Furthermore, by adding a fourth airport site closer to Interstate 64, highway construction costs would be reduced by millions of dollars depending upon its proximity to the Interstate.

Coincidentally and nearly concurrent with the December 1995 Final Report from LPA and ERA, Parkersburg representatives reiterated their support for the need of a regional airport and to continuing the study. However, they expressed grave concern that because of their proximity to Columbus and resulting small contribution to enplanements at any of the three final sites, their air service would be fragmented doing more harm than good. As a result, they asked that Parkersburg no longer be a part of the study.

Spring 1996 - Though sensitive to the wishes of Wood County residents and its elected representatives, the Port Authority made the decision to remove Parkersburg from the service area study based solely on the Economic Impact and Feasibility Update Studies completed the previous year. These studies further created the impetus to add a fourth site near Interstate 64.

Lincoln County, Yeager and Tri-State Become Sites

Before the Port Authority could make any proposals to the FAA, representatives from Lincoln County asked to offer a site to be added to the process. A great deal of preliminary work had already been done on the other three sites.

Because the Lincoln County site offered a 4th site which was near Interstate 64 (as per LPA/ERA studies), the Port Authority approved its inclusion for further study.

May 1996 - Though eliminated by the initial study, Yeager Airport representatives requested that their facility be added to the list of sites. Yeager's request was followed by a request from Tri-State Airport representatives that their site be added as well.

Authority member Mike Bright made a motion to accept the existing airports as sites, but the onus was on the leadership of those facilities to bring their studies up to the project status level of the other selected sites. The motion was seconded and carried.

Terrain analysis studies had to be conducted to bring these three new site entries up to the same standard as the initial three sites. Funding had been arranged to bring Lincoln County site terrain analysis up to standard, however, the terrain analysis for Yeager and Tri-State was out of scope and therefore not included in the FAA funding request.

The Transpark Concept

In 1995, a new concept of global air service was introduced which combined passenger service with air cargo service and multi-modal transportation industrial park. The WVPPA was formally presented the concept of a "Transpark." Patterned after mega projects underway in Kinston, North Carolina (near Raleigh) and other parts of the world, but on a proportionately smaller scale for West Virginia, a Transpark concept evolved. Likewise, the FAA was beginning to change its criteria for project funding and begin considering air cargo funding for the first time. Essentially, the concept embraces the "just-in-time" supply chain logistics. Theoretically, you would use air cargo or other transportation modes to supply raw materials to a Transpark, conduct the manufacturing or added value of a finished product and air ship it to a trans-continental or international market within hours. The savings results from inventory carrying cost reduction in the finished goods.

Because the transpark concept was not generally understood by the average citizen, and on a project justification basis, the viability of a regional airport in West Virginia must be justified upon passenger enplanements first and foremost. Essentially, if the project is not economically feasible on an enplanement basis, the air cargo will not make a meaningful difference today, nor is it likely the FAA will approve or fund a project whose feasibility is dependent upon air cargo. As a result, and because of possible trademark infringement, the Transpark name was dropped by a motion at the April 1998 meeting in Lincoln County. The Global TransPark (capital "P") is a copyright name of the project in North Carolina.

The Transpark Steering Committee and a Transpark Committee were formed at the end of 1995 and functioned through 1997. Co-chaired by Brooks McCabe of McCabe-Henley Associates and Dan Lacy, Vice President of Public Affairs of Ashland Oil, Ashland, KY, the Transpark Committee involved a large contingent of citizens, public officials and prominent individuals throughout the service area.

Public meetings with maps, sign boards, videos with WVPPA members and staff available to answer questions throughout 1996 and 1997. Public comments were solicited and collected, both in writing and by video taping at each of these events. Community participation and level of interest was very good and encouraging.

Kimley-Horn is Prepared to Make Technical Recommendation

Beginning in 1995 until today, public and media interest grew as the detail work was being prepared by Kimley-Horn and new information was being released. Various site representatives began to actively promote their respective sites. New information was presented at each WVPPA monthly meeting. Authority members toured the six sites on

three occasions. On one such tour, members walked the centerline of the greenfield sites and rode the centerline of the existing airports.

In the fall of 1996, Yeager Airport Director, Jeff Bubar resigned following a conflict with the Yeager Board of Directors. Mr. Bubar had been an integral participant, serving on the Regional Airport Technical Committee from 1992. Following Mr. Bubar's departure, Yeager airport supporters, and the Kanawha County Commission began to critically campaign against the project.

August 1997—At a large media event meeting, in Charleston, Kimley-Horn presented their findings and named the Evergreen Church site in Putnam County the technical recommendation as the final site. The next task of the Authority was to evaluate the data presented by Kimley-Horn and consider other factors which were not included in the study such as social, economic and political considerations. The WVPPA could then accept the Kimley-Horn recommendation, select one of the other sites or in fact reject all six sites. The statutory site selection decision rested with WVPPA.

Hoping for a prompt decision, a Study Group was organized to review this information and make a recommendation to the Board within thirty days. The group was comprised of Mike Bright, Robert Hardwick, Charles Lanham, and Jim Tilson. In the interest of fairness, the WVPPA consulted legal counsel to determine if the Study Group's meetings were required to be public. The then current legal counsel advised that the Study Group was a fact finding, working group, not a decision making body, and did not constitute a quorum, therefore they were under no requirement to meet standards of Public Meeting laws.

The Study Group began its work and with a goal of having a recommendation within 30-40 days which was later extended by the Governor because of an outcry from the Kanawha County Commission. Three meetings were conducted, the latter by conference call. These "working session" meetings were contested by Lincoln County resident Bill Ragette (a leader of opposition to the Regional Airport) filed a suit against the Port Authority seeking a temporary injunction, alleging violation of the Open Meeting's Law by the Study Group. All WVPPA members, Chairman and staff were named collectively and individually.

The Study Group voluntarily opened their meetings and started their work over. Copies of all prior work and meeting notes of all subsequent meetings available to the public.

October 1997—The WVPPA, at a regular monthly meeting, met in Huntington and following an update status report and recommendation by Mike Bright, voted to reduce the six sites to two...the Evergreen Church site in Putnam County and the I-64 site in Lincoln County. The objective was to

improve the quality of the remaining work and speed up the process so the next important phase could get underway.

November 1997—The Study Group held duly noticed public working session meetings by November.

Among several discoveries and the need for more information, two significant items were noted. The August 1997 Technical Recommendation failed to adjust and redefine the service area following the elimination of the Parkersburg market from the study and the vehicle miles traveled (VMT) were not quantified according to FAA requirements as outlined in the LPA/ERA Economic Feasibility Study.

Because of the complexity of the litigation, conflicting leadership strategy, lack of an organized work process to get to a final site selection and legal actions taken against WVPPA members, independent counsel to represent the Authority Board was requested and acquired.

Site Selection Stalled-Part 1

December 1997--The intention of the WVPPA at this time was to select a final site for further study by December 5, 1997. In the interest of public information, the Port Authority had made the decision to make all meetings—including those of the Study Group—public. All information at meetings was shared with the media in this effort.

The Port Authority Director signed a consent agreement to avoid a permanent injunction. This agreement voided all previous Study Group work. This necessitated a re-review process of the final sites.

The WVPPA was granted legal counsel it requested in the form of Tom Heywood and Judge Sam Cleckley (who wrote the open meetings law). A framework for public meetings was created for The Port Authority, and was accepted into agency guidelines.

January 1998—Having found Kimley-horn's Technical Recommendation flawed, the Port Authority chose not to endorse it, but to give Kimley-Horn time to correct it.

February 1998--The board chose to validate criteria to select the site, and accept it. The board started with the original Feasibility Study report from 1991 to decide if information they were using was consistent and logical.

The Public Gives Valuable Feedback

For the next few months the Port Authority chose to have public input at their meetings. Time was allotted at their meetings for interested citizens to give feedback on

the project. The meetings were held in counties in the I-64 corridor most likely affected by a Regional Airport, and were held in the following places and times:

- March-Charleston, Kanawha County
- April-Hamlin, Lincoln County
- May-Winfield, Putnam County
- June-Huntington, Cabell County

Because of the overwhelming response from residents of the Tri-State region, the Authority's August meeting was again scheduled in Huntington to allow the interested public a forum. A comprehensive forum was offered at the Authority's November meeting in Charleston in order to allow for any interested individuals to contribute their feedback.

Site Selection Stalled-Part 2

December 1998—Kimley-Horn had by now corrected its recommendation report. The WVPPA had planned to select a final site for further study this month. The site selection was stalled again. Yeager's governing body, the Central West Virginia Regional Airport Authority (CWVRAA) sued the WVPPA under the auspices their facility was "the affected agency" defined in Port Authority legislation. This pertained to the semantics of legislation which organized the Port Authority and gave it its powers. Legislation deems the Port Authority broad powers which do not supercede those of "the affected agency." Yeager contended their facility was just such an agency.

Kanawha County court deferred the case to the State Supreme Court.

At this time the first full time Executive Director of the Port Authority, Bill Jackson, began his work for the agency. Mr. Jackson was selected after a long talent search to fill this position. Jackson was formerly a manager of Baltimore-Washington International Airport and Aeronautics professor at the University of North Dakota.

January 1999—The State Supreme Court voted unanimously that, given the Port Authority's broad powers, Yeager Airport was not the affected agency as defined by legislation. This action freed the Port Authority to proceed with its site selection.

March 1999—Kimley-Horn offered its recommendation for the site for further study. Kimley-Horn's study now included the requisite VMT Report, and offered a revised service area in which the new Centroid for the Huntington-Charleston region was just a few miles from I-64 site in Lincoln County. Thus Kimley-Horn recommended the I-64/Kimley-horn site for further study.

After discussion, the Port Authority voted unanimously to accept the I-64/Lincoln County site for further study.

Soliciting Community Input

The I-64 site will now be scrutinized in a series of studies which are required by the FAA. These studies will also review the existing airports and help the Port Authority to decide on how best to utilize them in the state's aviation network should their commercial service be transferred to the new facility.

Already the WVPPA has invited the input of leadership in the service area to contribute their ideas for the transition of existing facilities. WVPPA director Bill Jackson sent a letter requesting input on transition possibilities to entities in the service area including:

- West Virginia's County Commissions (16)
- Ohio's County Commissions (3)
- Kentucky's County Fiscal Courts (7)
- Mayors of Huntington, Charleston, Beckley, Ashland, KY, and Ironton, OH.
- City Council Commissioners of Huntington, Charleston and Ironton, OH (Mayors of Ashland and Beckley perform this role in their respective cities)
- Economic Development Directors within Service Area (11)
- Leadership of Yeager and Tri-State Airports

The cutoff date for this information was June 11, 1999, but any input is welcome after that date.

The WVPPA received 17 responses. Only three of the responses were averse to the Regional Airport discussion. All were entities supporting Yeager Airport: The Kanawha County Commission, outgoing Charleston Mayor Kemp Melton, and incoming Mayor Jay Goldman. The Tri-State Airport Authority requested the letter be sent to each of its board members.

Three of the returned responses offered recommendations for the Transition Plan. Those responses were from Lincoln County Development director Shelley Huffman, Jackson County Development director Jack Burlingame, and Scioto County Commissioner, Steven T. Carter.

The remaining ten responses were supportive of the continuing study process, and came from the following entities: BIDCO; Ashland Economic Development Task Force; Jackson, Lincoln, Mingo, Putnam, and Wyoming County Commissions; the Ashland City Council, Mayor Jean Dean of Huntington, and Kentucky State Representative John Vincent.

Landfills and Legalities Temporarily Cloud the Issue

Spring 2000—Congress passed the AIR-21 financing bill for aviation. This legislation contained the condition that no landfills could be constructed within six miles of existing airports due to the possible problem of bird strikes with aircraft. The bill did not address airports being constructed near landfills.

The I-64 site for the proposed airport is within 3 miles of two landfills.

Yeager Airport presented this proximity as a death knell to the Lincoln County site at BIDCO/Charleston Chamber's Ad Hoc Business Evaluation Group meeting in August 2000. This resulted in much negative media coverage declaring the Regional Airport potentially dead.

However, WVPPA Director Jackson and Kimley-Horn consultant conferred with FAA officials who declared the landfills proximity to the site a non-issue given the nature of the project and its relation to the legislation. This information was presented to the Ad Hoc Group and received coverage from the local media.

The Public Weighs In and Controversy over Funding Request

Spring 2000--Community leaders from the Huntington Tri-State region and Putnam, Mason, Lincoln, and Logan Counties formed a citizen's caucus supporting the concept of the Regional Airport. This grassroots organization is called The Just In Time Committee (JIT), employing a name based on the growth of the just-in-time air cargo industry. The JIT has no formal affiliation with the WVPPA and the Regional Airport studies.

The JIT is incorporated and has so far run full-page newspaper ads supporting the airport in Charleston Newspapers, and smaller ads in the Huntington Herald Dispatch. They plan additional media placement and have their own website at www.i64airport.org.

Summer 2000— The WVPPA requested FAA funding for the final studies in the amount of \$2.4 million. This spurred the CWVRAA to sue the Port Authority for allegedly violating the West Virginia Open Public Meetings Law. Yeager alleges the Port Authority deliberately violated the law when Director Jackson made the request for additional FAA funding without discussing the request in an open, noticed meeting. The case is expected to be scheduled in Kanawha County court in Autumn 2000. The CWVRAA voted to seek compensation from the WVPPA for court fees.

In the same period the Business and Industrial Development Corporation (BIDCO) of Charleston made the decision to evaluate the Regional Airport studies. This decision to study the viability of the proposed project cost the organization \$40,000 in annual funding from the Kanawha County Commission which oversees Yeager.

BIDCO formed the Ad Hoc Business Evaluation Group with 21 members—a mix of Regional Airport proponents, opponents, and those who are neutral on the issue. The Ad Hoc Group first met in July 2000 and received all the WVPPA's Regional Airport studies

done so far as well as those done by Yeager Airport. The WVPPA presents information on an as requested basis to the Ad Hoc Group and as often as new and pertinent information becomes available.

The WVPPA plans to accompany the Ad Hoc Group members to airports in other states which are similar in scope and mission to the proposed Regional Airport. The time and date for this travel is still pending.

The Ad Hoc Group is expected to make a decision regarding its endorsement of the Regional Airport by Winter 2000.

Yeager Airport completed a new Master Plan for their facility. The WVPPA invited Yeager's leadership to present their Master Plan at the monthly board meeting in September. Yeager declined the invitation and instead invited the WVPPA to come to their facility to see their presentation. The WVPPA voted against accepting the invitation

The Final Studies by Summer 2001

Under their original contract Kimley Horn completed the following studies in the year 2000:

- Financial Feasibility Study—Updated the original Financial Feasibility Study and determined the construction of a new greenfield airport is financially feasible. The Financial Feasibility Study was completed and accepted by the Board in February 2000.
- Master Plan—Reviewed the airport in greater detail at the I-64 site. Provides an overview of the airport project currently while projecting future possibilities based on composition, mission, and reason for existence. The Draft Master Plan was completed and accepted by the board in September 2000.

Kimley-Horn's contract with the WVPPA is not yet complete. There are several additional requirements asked for by the FAA which must be accomplished. The FAA requires a final set of studies to be completed moving into the final phase of the overall study effort, completion of the Environmental Impact Statement.

The WVPPA plans to complete the following FAA required studies to be used in reaching a build/no build decision by Summer 2001:

- Transition and Re-Use Plan—A detailed study of operational control and ownership of the existing airports, and their relationship with the new facility. Will also help decide governance and cost sharing of facilities.
- Benefit/Cost Analysis—In accordance with FAA procedures, this study will weigh the benefits of the proposed airport against the cost.

- Economic Impact Study—A review of the impact the project could have over the region and state economically. Will look at initial generation and regeneration of finances. Will also examine money generated by the airport(s) and how it is permeated throughout the community.

Public Outreach program to include sharing of information concerning the studies and their results relative to the airport issue.

These three studies will be conducted simultaneously. If the decision is made to build the airport then the site will undergo:

- Environmental Impact Study—Will examine purpose, need, and alternatives as well as environmental impacts of the project. Review will extend beyond airport site, and study the project's impact on air, land and water in area.

The WVPPA will publicly issue a Request for Proposal in Autumn 2000 to find a new consultant to complete the new series of studies. Kimley-Horn is expected to bid for the contract of Project Manager of the final studies.

There will be ongoing Program Management and a Public Outreach Program throughout the duration of the study. Some of these studies will be conducted simultaneously, as evidenced by the suggested timeline accompanying this document.