

Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities Birchwood Airport Master Plan (AMP) Update:

Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) Meeting #3 – NOTES

December 14, 2022; 3:00 – 5:00 pm

Participants (see Guiding Slide 3 for full listing of SAG entities)



SAG Members

- Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association: Rob Stapleton
- Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF): Philana Miles (Birchwood AMP Project Manager), James Sowerwine (Right of Way Manager)
- Alaska Railroad Corporation: Brian Lindemood (absent)
- Birchwood Airport Association: Abe Harman
- Birchwood Community Council: Val Jokela
- Birchwood Recreation and Shooting Park: Jim Stoneking
- Civil Air Patrol: Wally Parks, Jeff Banks (also representing glider community)
- Eklutna, Inc.: Kyle Smith
- Native Village of Eklutna Carrie Brophil, Marc Lamoreaux
- Talon Hangar Association: Dennis Serie

Other Airport Users Present

- Alaska Mountain Soaring Association: Pete Brown

Other Invited Participants

- Federal Aviation Administration (FAA): Jonathan Lindquist and Carley Wallace (absent)

Project Consultants

- HDL Engineering Consultants: Mark Swenson (Consultant Project Manager), Heather Campfield, Erik Jordt
- Agnew::Beck Consulting: Shelly Wade (Public Involvement, Land Use and 3P Lead), Meg Friedenauer

Objectives

Share and get SAG input on:

- Stakeholder feedback on draft airport layout alternatives.
- Revised airport layout alternatives that respond to stakeholder feedback.
- Planning process, schedule, and next steps.

Project Schedule & Key Milestones (See Guiding Slides 4 – 6 for additional detail)

The revised schedule includes:

- Draft Plan Development, Release, and Review – Fall 2022 to Winter 2023 (currently happening). Includes the *Preliminary* Airport Master Plan Update, Layout and Aeronautical Survey and ongoing public outreach.
 - Finalize Land Use Assessment
 - Finalize Public-Private partnership analysis
 - Host public workshop #3
 - Host SAG meeting # 3
 - Provide ongoing updated via social media and on the project website

- Public comment period ends
- Plan Refinement and Finalization – Spring/Summer 2023. Includes the *Final* Airport Master Plan Update, Layout, and Aeronautical Survey.
 - Prepare final draft Alternatives and Recommendation Report
 - Provide ongoing updates via social media and the project website
 - Prepare draft Airport Layout Plan
 - Draft Airport Master Plan Update released for public review
 - Host SAG meeting #4 and public meeting #4
 - Public comment period
 - Ongoing updates via social media and the project website
 - Finalize Airport Master Plan Update
 - Finalize Airport Layout Plan
 - Announce the release of the final plans via social media and the project website

Progress Since October 2021:

- Second Stakeholder Advisory Group and Public Meetings (Fall 2021)
- Airport Stakeholder Survey (Spring 2022)
- Project Received Additional Funding Based on Public Involvement (Summer 2022)
- DOT Decision to Plan for Existing Runway Length & Width (Summer 2022)
- Public-Private Partnership Summary

What’s Changed with the Alternatives, November to December 2022 (See Guiding Slides 7 and 8)

Each public comment received regarding the alternatives as presented at the November 12th workshop was logged and considered in the versions we are sharing today with the SAG. If a comment isn’t addressed, we can discuss why that wasn’t included in the revisions. The comments from the November 12th workshop are captured in the “Results Summary” and posted on the website. The entire public comment tracker will be shared with the SAG in late December 2022/early January 2023.

Key Points

- Highest level of support was for Alternative 2 with some adjustments. Checks most of the boxes/criteria that will be used to evaluate all alternatives (see below).
- Changing the 02R/20L designation was discussed at length at the open house. Each alternative proposes changing the designation to 02S/20S for the gravel runway and changing the main runway designation to 02S/20S to address issues of safety and confusion over the radio. The use of ‘S’ was chosen given it is what is used for the Wasilla and Palmer airports designation of ‘S’ for gravel runways.
- Land acquisition – the master plan will outline how land acquisition will be addressed. There is a potential meeting in January with DOT&PF, Eklutna, FAA, and the consultant team. The results from that discussion will be shared after the meeting.

Alternative 1 – See Slide 7

- No changes – maintaining the status quo. This is not a sustainable option for the State as FAA wants inline taxiways removed from the gravel runways.
- ***No Discussion.***

Alternative 2 – See Slide 7

Summary of changes

- Renamed Runway 02R/20L to Runway 02S/20S.
- Added ski-plane turnarounds at each threshold of Runway 02S/20S.
- Showed removed sections of Taxiway A as maintained grass area for emergency glider landing operations.
- Relocated Taxiway D to intersect threshold of Runway 20S.
- Showed PAPI's installed on northeast side of main Runway 02L/20R to keep emergency glider landing area clear of visual aids.
- Showed section of apron between southwest section of Taxiway B and lease lots as paved to reduce FOD (foreign object debris.)
- Relocated weather station from the Transient Apron to newly acquired land south of the airport.
- Ensured that access is maintained around southwest side of new airport property for adjacent landowners and trail users.
- Re-aligned the access road to the Southeast Apron to be outside of the OFA/OFZ of Runway 02S/20S.
- Installed a supplemental wind cone on east side of airport.

Discussion – Comments (from SAG/public) and Responses (from Consultant Team)

- **Comment** – emergency glider operations – the glider operators' preference was to relocate everything out of infield areas between main runways and Taxiway Bravo.
 - **Response** – the design would not maintain safe grades, but we tried to provide room on the other side and suggests airport maintenance maintain the grass as short as possible and remove all obstructions so the area in front of the gravel runway or beyond it could be used.
- **Comment** – the Southeast Apron is below grade.
 - **Response** – we can recommend that when the runway 02S/20S is redone, it will be brought up to grade be paved beyond that to create more room for emergency operations. Glider operators and others agree this option is a good solution.
- **Comment** – Can the existing road between the NW apron and SE apron be made into a taxiway or shared use?
 - **Response** – we talked to FAA about this and a shared use component like this would have to be designed to taxiway standards, but taxiway cannot fit in that area. We also talked with the AK Railroad about an option to develop the buffer between the railroad and the road and they were not receptive to that idea. We don't see an option or space for a shared use space in that area.
- **Comment** – Are there any creative ways to utilize space near NE apron to create more lease lots?
 - **Response** – we have posed that question to DOT&PF and awaiting an answer. If it's feasible, it will be included in the alternative.
- **Comment** – Is an “elephant ear” or turnaround possible to add to the main runway?
 - **Response** – there may be an area/space beyond Taxiway Charlie to the north – there is space there to do “run ups.” The area of concern from operators is on the Taxiway Gulf side with a turnout near Gulf and Bravo or make Gulf wider to alleviate congestion. We will work something up to try to address that issue.

- **Comment** – Runway renaming “S” seems confusing and users likely won’t use it but will call it “gravel.”
 - **Response** – about five people at the public meeting were interested in seeing that runway renamed from 02L and 02R. We will ask the FAA about using “G” instead of “S”, infers “glider” or “gravel.”
- **Comment** – Some of the alternatives includes expansion that could affect cultural resources on nearby property. Local Tribes are being consulted and are part of the SAG.
 - **Related Comment** – Native Village of Eklutna is OK with the Alternative 2 which maintains the wildlife corridor but would need more information about some of the cultural resources in nearby woods if more expansion was discussed.
- **Comment from Consulting Team** – Regarding item #7 (acquire airport property – 12 acres), that sliver of land is an aeronautical easement. We show it on the alternatives as acquiring the parcel because it’s assumed the ultimate plan or goal would be to have fee simple rights to the property. Does that work for DOT? (DOT had no comment.)
 - **Response from SAG Member** – Shooting Park is fine with it remaining an easement and mowed down to grass but routing a different way would require the shooting range to reroute the archery walkway.
 - **Response from Consulting Team** – We will plan on continue to show that as an aeronautical easement if agreeable to DOT. If DOT has conflict, consulting team will discuss with Shooting Park.
- **Comment** – Alternative 2 would require more plowing and where will the additional snow be stored?
 - **Response** – Each alternative has a discussion of snow storage areas.
- **Comment** – Regarding relocation of the weather station – has there been a survey in moving from the center of the airport to an end? The winds can change from one end of the airport to the other. Other users commented that pilots usually use the windsocks to gauge wind on approach and moving the weather station would not negatively impact use. Other users commented that it makes sense to move the weather station from the congested area. One of the advantages of moving it would be to allow for more tie-down space.
 - **Response** – We moved the weather station to remove it from a congested area and because there isn’t the required clearance around it right now. There has not been a weather survey done. The advantage of moving is that more space would open for potential tie-downs.
- **Comment** – Will the need for larger glider tiedowns be included?
 - **Response** – Yes, larger aircraft or glider tie-downs will be included. They are shown currently on the plan in the new apron on the southside, but a better spot would be on the expansion on the northeast apron; awaiting more discussion with FAA on this point. Consultants are hoping to include 10 spaces for larger aircraft, ideally pull-through spaces facing the mountains in the new apron area to accommodate more ski-type aircraft.
- Alternative 2 is likely going to be the recommended alternative by the contracting team; FAA and DOT&PF will consider that recommendation but make final decision.

Alternative 3 – Slide 8

- Renamed Runway 02S/20L to Runway 02S/20S.
- Added ski-plane turnarounds at each threshold of Runway 02S/20S.
- Showed PAPI’s installed on northeast side of main Runway 02L/20R to keep emergency glider landing area north of gravel runway clear of visual aids.

- Showed section of apron between southwest section of Taxiway B and lease lots as paved to reduce FOD.
- Relocated weather station from the Transient Apron to newly acquired land south of the airport.
- Ensured that access is maintained around southwest side of new airport property for adjacent landowners and trail users.
- Installed a supplemental wind cone on southeast side of airport.

Discussion – Comments (from SAG/public) and Responses (from Consultant Team)

- No discussion. This alternative did not receive support.

Alternative 4 – Slide 8

- Renamed Runway 02R/20L to Runway 02S/20S.
- Showed PAPI's installed on northeast side of main Runway 02L/20R to keep emergency glider landing area on east side of 02R/20L.
- Showed section of apron between southwest section of Taxiway B and lease lots as paved to reduce FOD.
- Relocated weather station from the Transient Apron to newly acquired land south of the airport.
- Installed a supplemental wind cone on southeast side of airport.
- This alternative has the most impact to land, cultural resources, wildlife, and several other challenges.

Discussion – Comments (from SAG/public) and Responses (from Consultant Team)

- In most public input and subsequent discussions – general agreement this alternative is not feasible and is not supported.

Next Steps

- The contracting team will work with DOT&PF to prepare the full draft plan, including continued evaluation of layout alternatives, incorporation of public and SAG comments, and ultimately, recommend or identify a preferred alternative. Evaluation criteria for the alternatives analysis:
 - Safety
 - Environmental Impacts
 - Airspace and Obstructions
 - Land Use
 - Meeting Demand for Additional Lease Lots
 - Revenue Generation
 - Maintenance Cost
 - Capital Cost
- The full draft master plan is slated for SAG and public review Spring 2023.