

Palmdale Backed as Airport Site

Study Calls It Best Choice Despite Adverse Effects

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An environmental impact study that warns of adverse short-term effects during the planning, construction and operation of the proposed \$500 million Palmdale International Airport and of resulting strains on local citizens and government will be presented today to the Los Angeles Board of Airport Commissioners.

Despite the adverse effects, the report stresses that construction of the facility is the best alternative to deal with a projected overabundance of air passengers.

The five existing Los Angeles-area airports—Los Angeles International, Ontario International, Long Beach, Hollywood-Burbank and Orange County—"will be insufficient to meet aviation demand starting about 1985," the report says.

By 1995, the report continues, demand could exceed the capacity of existing airports by 32 million passengers annually.

The major conclusions of the study are:

—The total number of passengers expected annually at Los Angeles-area airports by the year 2000 is set at 104 million, down 30 million from figures in a 1974 preliminary draft of the study. The decline in the number of air passengers is due to a slowing of the population rate, changes in life-style and economic conditions, the study says.

—The annual number of passen-

gers at Palmdale International Airport is projected at 12 million in 1995, just over a third of the prediction of the 1974 preliminary report.

—The Palmdale airport will include two pairs of parallel runways, each 14,000 feet long and 150 feet wide. Initial development would include the outermost pair of runways, with additional construction to be decided on after 1990.

—The report predicts a booming urbanization for the Palmdale-Lancaster area, with the population of

The population of the Antelope Valley would increase by 117%.

Palmdale forecast to increase by 31,000—to a total of 84,800—with the airport. In the entire Antelope Valley area, a 117% population increase would occur if the airport is built, compared to a 59% increase without the airport.

—Along with urbanization and industrial development, the study forecasts increased taxes, crime rates and congestion, and a loss of identity for area residents as a result of the airport development.

—Additional public facilities must be provided in a number of areas, with the cost of such improvements expected to total \$527 million to \$560

million. That expense, the report says, would be borne mostly by local and state taxpayers, with little federal aid. Among the most crucial demands would be the construction of water and sewage facilities, the report says.

—The study reverses a recommendation made in the 1974 preliminary report for an access road from the Los Angeles basin to the Antelope Valley through the San Gabriel Mountains. The route, the study says, is environmentally and financially too costly a proposition.

—The study urges caution in constructing facilities at the airport site, which it notes is two miles from the San Andreas Fault at its closest point. It also urges construction of a multi-million dollar flood control system at the airport to minimize flooding and erosion, but does not indicate if taxpayers or the Department of Airports would pay for the system.

—Noise and air pollution resulting from construction of the facility will not be severe, the report says. Most future air pollution in the area will result from emissions in the Los Angeles Basin and airport development will have a "negligible" effect on air quality. There will be a general increase in noise, but noise abatement procedures will minimize the impact.

The six-volume report was undertaken in 1973 by Arthur D. Little, Inc., a San Francisco consulting firm, after court actions were filed charging that only a skimpy environmental study was made before government approval of the site in 1970.

"However," it adds, "in the long run these commitments can be considered investments for future benefits in transportation and indirectly on community improvements."

As the community expands, the report points out, "it will impose greater service loads in the future, which will place additional administrative and service demands on local government agencies."

Among the most urgent demands will be the construction of new water and sewage facilities, the report says.

"The combination of the airport's water use with that resulting from direct and induced growth will make necessary regionwide solutions to avoid serious adverse impacts," the report says. "Unless a distribution system for imported water is initiated by the early 1980s, groundwater resources . . . will be unable to support future activity."

The report gave no indication from which areas the water would be brought.

In addition, the report says, the long-range effects of the airport "will include waste generation that will

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outstrip existing landfill capacities."

As a result of public hearings and reviews, preliminary drafts of the study were rewritten and in some cases broadened. If the current study is accepted by the commissioners, it will be forwarded to the federal government for consideration.

While the airport's progress has been stalled by lawsuits and the filing of environmental impact reports, land acquisition by the Department of Airports has continued, and officials last week said the department has acquired 88% of the 17,700-acre site.

Cost of the land so far totals \$88,132,000—with the amount expected to reach \$90 million when final purchases are made.

Multiple adverse effects will be felt in the Palmdale area if the airport is developed, the study says.

"The planning, construction and operation of the Palmdale facility and subsequent related development may be considered adverse in the short run in terms of physical and community disruption, construction impacts, initial underutilization of facilities, capital cost outlays and public inconvenience," the report says.

Along with increases in crime and traffic congestion, residents living near the airport site could suffer "disrupting and disconcerting effects" if new residents enter the community too quickly or on too large a scale, the report says.

Faced with the industrial and commercial development, the identities of neighborhoods in the area will change, the report says. Instead of the predominantly single-family homes that now exist, there will be a greater number of multi-unit dwellings and dense residential development, and industry may take over current residential areas.

On the ecological front, the report offers strongly worded warnings on arbitrary construction at the site because of possible seismic activity.

The types of soils found in the Antelope Valley—alluvium, fill and loose sand—present the "greatest hazard" during an earthquake, the report points out.

Construction at the site "should be located with the utmost caution" to prevent landsliding or slumping after an earthquake, the study adds.

Elsewhere, the study urges the construction of a \$15 million-\$19 million flood protection system at the airport.

"If only minimal flood control facilities are built," the study warns, "then erosion and flood damage will continue to occur."

While discounting the chance of severe noise and air pollution resulting from the airport development, the report does offer several suggestions aimed at cutting back on pollution and curtailing the use of energy.

Towing of aircraft to and from runways, idling and taxing at reduced engine power and possible modification of flight schedules at peak times are among the alternatives suggested by the report.

The report also strongly warns against construction of the access road from Los Angeles to Palmdale through the San Gabriel Mountains, a route which the study's preliminary drafts supported.

"Environmental and cost factors are considered to be severe and adverse in both construction and operation of such a crossing," the study says. The route would require substantial earth moving, strain recreational resources, disrupt natural habitats and "be susceptible to closing from landslides, earthquakes and winter snows."

The overall ecological impact of the airport will be one of "change," the report says, with many species of animals retreating to remote corners of the site or disappearing altogether.

Elsewhere, the report reiterates the position taken in its preliminary forms that other alternatives—maintenance of existing airports, improvement of those facilities, or construction of a facility in an area other than Palmdale—are unfeasible.

The five existing area airports will be unable to meet passenger demands by 1985, the study says, and the environmental impact of any expansion would be "severe."

Of the five sites originally proposed for an additional airport, only the Palmdale facility is a reasonable alternative at present, the report says.

Edwards Air Force Base is unavailable because of its military uses, purchase cost and distance from Los Angeles, the report says.

The airspace above Fox Field in the Antelope Valley is too crowded, while the proposed airport off the shore of Long Beach has "comparatively greater environmental and financial constraints" than the other alternatives, the study says.

The proposed Chino Hills location in northern Orange County is a possible site for future development, the study says, but its smaller capacity and difficult terrain place it second to Palmdale.

However, the report stresses, a combination of several of the alternatives may be required in the future if the number of air passengers increases.

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