

attendees that there is a need to determine a realistic estimate of the cost of airport system development nationwide. NASAO will continue to bring these funding needs to the attention of Congress and the Administration. NASAO plans to continue to work with FAA to pursue innovative ways to improve AIP, to support more overall funding for the program, and to make the dollars go further. NASAO remains committed to the important partnership that exists between the state aviation agencies, FAA, and airport sponsors.

THE VIEWS OF METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATIONS ON AIRPORT SYSTEM CAPITAL REQUIREMENTS

H. Alan Speak
Southwestern Pennsylvania Regional Planning Commission

Introduction and Background

For those in the aviation industry, the acronym MPO may not be well known, even though it has been around for about 35 years. It stands for Metropolitan Planning Organization. These organizations undertake areawide planning and transportation planning in the metropolitan areas of the country. MPOs primarily focus on surface transportation planning (highways and transit facilities) and have a rigorous transportation planning process that was clearly defined by the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) of 1992. While metropolitan areas have been required to undertake the 3C process of "continuing, cooperative and comprehensive" planning since 1962, ISTEA calls for a more integrated planning process to better meet the needs of all constituencies. In addition, ISTEA provides metropolitan areas more control over transportation decisions in their metropolitan area.

Over the past 15 years, with the encouragement of FAA, a few MPOs have undertaken the preparation of a metropolitan/regional airport system plan. This aviation system planning was funded with the system planning set-aside for states and metropolitan areas that was contained in federal legislation. The more prominent of the MPOs that have participated in this aviation system planning process are Los Angeles, Oakland, Salt Lake City, Dallas, St. Louis, Detroit, Atlanta, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh.

At best there is a loose affiliation of MPOs across the country that talk with one another about aviation system planning. While the MPOs have a national association, the National Association of Regional Councils, NARC, they are everything to all MPOs, regional planning

commissions, Council of Governments, etc.; and aviation is not a top-priority issue with them.

When TRB stated that they wanted a collective view of the industry, rather than multiple, fragmented, individual opinions, I knew it would be difficult to prepare a statement for MPOs and I can assure you that was the case. MPOs as a group do not have a capital needs list for airport improvements in metropolitan areas across the country. Individual MPOs, such as Philadelphia, have prepared a capital needs program as part of their Regional Airport System Plan. The Philadelphia program clearly identifies airport capital needs to 2020. Furthermore, they estimate that only 60 percent of those capital needs will be constructed due to the reduction in the AIP.

In late January 1997 the Secretary of the Department of Transportation published in the Federal Register a proposed policy statement encouraging Metropolitan Planning Organizations and Airport Operators to cooperate in transportation planning. This policy statement was directed at the MPOs serving urbanized areas of one million or more in population and clearly indicated that funding of aviation system planning activities in the large metropolitan areas would receive a high priority within the FAA and DOT. While DOT and FAA, through this policy statement, encourage airport operators to become involved and cooperate in the transportation planning process in metropolitan areas, it is difficult to see the aviation mode being considered an equal partner in the transportation planning process when their own aviation system planning process at the national level is wanting.

As you may know, NEXTEA, National Economic Crossroads Transportation Efficiency Act, has been released by the administration. It is believed that the administration's proposal will serve as the starting point for a reauthorization bill. However, it is also believed that there will be significant changes in the legislation. This piece of legislation will form the next generation of legislation for surface transportation and should incorporate provisions to assure participation in the process by the aviation stakeholders.

As mentioned above, there are relatively few MPOs that are currently involved in the aviation system planning process. However, we have been able to assemble in a short time the views of representatives from Philadelphia, St. Louis, and Pittsburgh who have considerable experience in aviation system planning. We believe this statement is representative of Metropolitan Planning Organizations. Representatives from Philadelphia, Roger Moog, and St. Louis, Paula Raney, are in attendance at this workshop. William Keller from the St. Louis MPO actively participated in the development of this statement but was unable to attend this workshop.

The balance of this statement will address the three issues that have been identified as the primary focus of this workshop.

Comparison and Discussion of Estimates of Airport System Capital Needs

After listening to six previous speakers address the topic of comparing the various estimates of capital needs and suggesting ways that they might be consolidated into one list, I wondered if there would be anything left to say. I am pleased, but you may not be, to say that I believe that there is.

MPOs do not believe the various aviation stakeholder organizations will be able to overcome their individual orientation and develop an integrated, objective, prioritized, fiscally restrained list of capital improvements for America's airports. This does not mean to say it cannot be done nor should not be done. What it does say is that assembling a "basket of projects" in which every stakeholder group gives a little to get a little, is not the way to develop a national priority spending plan for the Nation's airports. Neither is the much maligned National Plan for Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS) which has packaged individual airport wishes to arrive at a total estimate of dollars needed by airports for Congress.

We believe what needs to be done at the national level is the same thing that the FAA has had legislation for, developed Advisory Circulars for, and funded for 15 years, which is to prepare a National Airport System Plan. This National Airport System Plan would identify the airports to be included in the plan, specify their role and function, and describe airport improvements needed to reach the plan's time horizon. As part of this plan, each airport would have a five-year capital improvement program and a one-year capital budget.

FAA's role in directing the planning process would be fourfold: 1) provide funding to undertake the preparation of the National Airport System Plan, 2) set the specifications for the plan, to include a capital needs assessment, [this is the most critical phase of the process], 3) review the plans that have been prepared to assure compliance with the established specifications and other issues, and 4) formally adopt the plan as the National Airport System Plan. Notice, I did not say the FAA should prepare the plan.

The plan should be prepared with the building block process that already exists with the MPOs and the states. These planning units may prepare the plan themselves or engage consultants to prepare the plan *in strict conformity to the specifications established by the FAA*. These plan

specifications would be closely reviewed by the stakeholder groups before they are promulgated as the specifications for the preparation of a National Airport System Plan.

It has been said by FAA representatives that FAA does not own airports and cannot decide to implement specific improvements at an airport. We acknowledge and accept the local ownership role. However, it is believed that FAA should know what it wants as an airport system for the country. Those metropolitan areas and states that have participated in the airport system planning process know what they want for an airport system for their area. FAA should be able to do the same.

Some have commented that FAA would not be facing this funding crisis if the Federal Aviation Administration had a well-founded National Aviation System Plan which clearly defines airport needs. The current approach certainly does not. It provides considerable flexibility and the opportunity for political involvement. Perhaps this is what Congress really wants. However, in a time of a funding crisis for airport improvements, the current system will not work.

Current Methods for Allocating Resources

Instead of having population-based formulas to distribute AIP funds, perhaps funds ought to be distributed based upon need as established for large, medium and small hub airports, business airports and general aviation airports. The level of funding for these categories could be determined from the needs established in the National Airport System Plan and the airports' ability to raise revenues and pay for their own improvements. Further, the National Airport System Plan must include reliever airports that clearly fulfill the reliever role, and privately owned, open-for-public-use, airports that serve a national need. It should also provide funds to preserve privately owned airports that are part of the National Airport System Plan.

With FAA's initiative to fund aviation system planning at MPOs serving metropolitan areas with populations of over 1 million, this funding should initially go to MPOs in Block-Grant states so that the MPOs could assist in determining the airport improvement projects to be funded in their metropolitan area.

While there may be some unique and innovative funding methods that might be helpful, user fees would probably suffice. They are simple and commonly accepted by the public and the aviation community. The public and the aviation community become disenchanted with user fees when they are diverted for other purposes.

Adequacy of Existing Funds to Meet the Needs

If one can identify the "real" needs, the answer to this question becomes quite simple. We do not believe that the "real" needs have been identified, and thus the answer to this question is elusive. The Coopers & Lybrand Financial Assessment concludes with a statement that their best judgment of the needs for the 1997-2002 period is in the range of \$7 billion to \$8 billion per year. This compares to the average of \$6 billion per year over the last four years. From this assessment it seems clear that funds are not adequate to meet the needs.

If Congress enacts the Administration's proposal for funding AIP for Fiscal Year 1998, at \$1.1 billion, the AIP funding level have been reduced by nearly 50 percent in the last eight years. Even though the system has seen some "new money" in the form of PFCs, the Philadelphia MPO believes that we are losing infrastructure and compromising safety. They recommend that FAA and

DOT take a leadership role with Congress and act as advocates for general aviation, reliever, and commercial airports.

Conclusion

It is apparent that considerable effort should be devoted to identifying the Nation's "real" aviation needs, and we propose that this be done through the preparation of a National Airport System Plan. With a realistic plan for needs, answers to the question of whether funds are adequate to meet the needs become apparent. A fiscally restrained prioritization of airport improvements developed from a National Airport System Plan would assure that the most needed improvements are funded. Those projects that are not funded will provide the airport sponsors and other stakeholders with a powerful message for Congress to provide money for airport improvements.