



## Cities Seek Legislature's Help to Resolve 10-Year-Long Conflict with Aviation Agency over Aurora State Airport

### Proposed 2021 Legislation HB 2497 Creates Transparent Public Process for Oregon Department of Aviation Agency Communications and Coordination with Local Governments and Communities on Aurora State Airport Master Planning

Over the past decade the Oregon Department of Aviation (ODA) has demonstrated an uncooperative attitude with local governments in management of the Aurora State Airport. The City Councils of Aurora and Wilsonville seek legislative intervention to improve this state agency's relationships and planning coordination with local communities directly impacted by the agency's actions at the Aurora State Airport.

The Cities of Aurora and Wilsonville that are closest to the airport contend that ODA circumvented Oregon public-process and land-use laws regarding the controversial *2012 Aurora State Airport Master Plan*. Ever since 2010, when the members of an advisory committee called-out questionable agency practices during the faulty Aurora State Airport master-planning process, ODA has been virtually unresponsive to concerns repeatedly raised by local communities.

Issues of significant public concern regarding airport operations and proposed expansion have been brought to ODA's attention for a decade without a meaningful response or opportunity to discuss. Public concerns focus on negative externalization of airport impacts on local communities without planning for mitigation.

To date, *the only open public forum* on the Aviation Department efforts to expand the Aurora State Airport was held by the Wilsonville City Council in November 2018 that drew 200 attendees. The situation with ODA became so tenuous even for state legislators that in 2018 the legislature commissioned PSU Oregon Solutions to research and produce the *Aurora State Airport Assessment Report*, which found a host of agency management troubles, improper influence and poor public engagement and communications problems.

Specific issues of concern include intensified Airport-related auto traffic congestion on limited rural roads, lack of sewage/wastewater processing facilities, speculative real-estate land-use cost pressures detrimental to agricultural operations, and aviation-related noise and greenhouse-gas carbon and lead-emissions pollution. ODA refuses to address these issues.

Despite the consistent local concern and repeated requests for clear information sharing and coordinated planning efforts, agency leaders will soon enter the second decade of doggedly pursuing their own plans without involving their most highly affected closest neighbors in constructive resolution. A change is needed, and appears that it must be legislatively mandated.

**Sponsored by Rep. Courtney Neron (HD-26), proposed 2021 House Bill 2497 advances four primary objectives** focused on inclusive, transparent decision-making process the complies with Oregon land-use and public-process laws:

1. **Creates a Public Forum for Intergovernmental Communications and Planning:** Specifies the formation of an inclusive intergovernmental agreement (IGA) between the state Department of Aviation and the local governments of Clackamas and Marion Counties and the Cities of

Aurora and Wilsonville that provides a forum to facilitate communications and collaborative planning for land-use, transportation, environmental, infrastructure and related issues of concern regarding operations of the Aurora State Airport. A 2010 Department of Aviation IGA at the start of the master planning process utilizes a “gerrymandered map” of the 10,000-foot airport impact area to exclude the adjacent local governments of Clackamas County and Wilsonville; see page 4.

2. **Updates the Aurora State Airport Master Plan:** Provides for the updating of the Aurora State Airport Master Plan that complies with FAA regulations, Oregon land-use laws, and public-engagement procedures to provide for transparent decision-making process and easy-to-follow guidance for agency implementation.
3. **Requires Environmental Pollution Review:** Authorizes much-needed environmental assessments of current airport pollution levels, including storm/surface water, ground water, air and noise, that provide a scientific baseline of information.
4. **Calls for Municipal Annexation:** Creates a planning timeframe for the annexation of the Aurora State Airport into the City of Aurora for municipal governance and the provision of urban infrastructure services to support growing operations at the Airport.

House Bill 2497, pending before the Joint Committee on Transportation, is a “process bill,” rather than “result bill”: that is, the bill sets up a process for an IGA to address Aurora State Airport issues and updating the Aurora State Airport Master Plan without dictating what the specific results of these processes will be. The bill provides a process road-map for creating a transparent public process to resolve the numerous ongoing Aurora State Airport controversies.

### **Aviation State Agency Has Troubled History, Repeatedly Demonstrates Inability to Work Cooperatively with Local Governments**

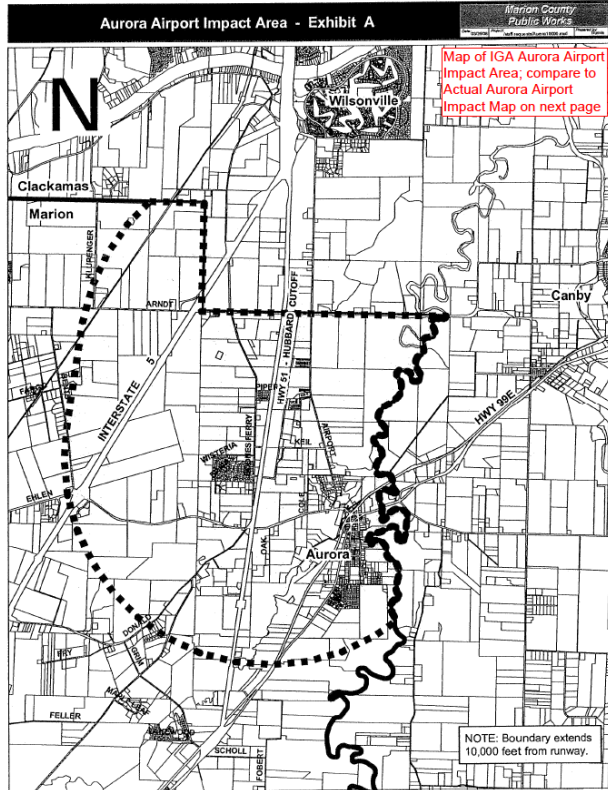
To prepare for expansion of the Aurora State Airport prior the start of the Airport master-planning process, ODA developed and signed in 2010 an “Intergovernmental Agreement on the Coordination of Growth Management and Transportation Issues” that excluded the adjacent jurisdictions of Clackamas County and Wilsonville that sought for years to participate in collaborative planning efforts with ODA, Marion County and Aurora. However, within a couple of years after signing the IGA as the community witnessed ODA doing whatever it wanted to do at the Aurora State Airport despite attempts at providing public input, Mayor Jim Mierow of Aurora declared, “This IGA ain’t worth the paper its written on.”

The ODA IGA used a “gerrymandered” 10,000-foot Impact Area Map that arbitrarily excludes nearby residents within the 10,000-foot impact area who live in Clackamas County and Wilsonville. The City of Aurora recognizes that an inclusive public process for airport master planning is preferable to a process that excludes important stakeholders from participating in long-term planning.

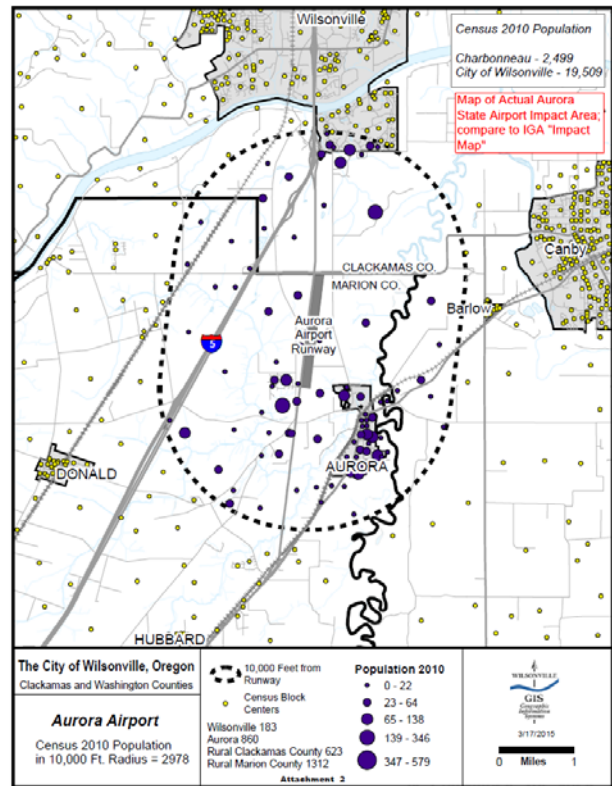
During the master planning process for the Aurora State Airport, members of the Policy Advisory Committee became so alarmed at ODA’s manipulation of the process that they expressed a set of concerns in 2010 to the Oregon Aviation Board and Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

“As local-government and community-organization members of the Planning Advisory Committee (PAC) to the Aurora State Airport Master Plan, we have grave concerns that our participation in the process is not intended to be meaningful. We see serious deficiencies in how the process is being conducted... and we seek to resolve these issues of concern.

"In a nutshell, we are very concerned that the Aurora Airport master planning process is being rushed on a condensed schedule...without adequate discussion of issues at the PAC level in order to satisfy preconceived outcomes of a few special interests that may be detrimental to the greater public good."



ODA IGA showing "gerrymandered" Aurora State Airport Impact Area Map designed to exclude Clackamas County and Wilsonville.



Actual 10,000-foot Aurora State Airport Impact Area showing 2010 Census block populations of both impacted counties and cities.

## Significant Public Concerns and Detrimental Impacts on Local Communities Ignored by State Aviation Department at Aurora State Airport

Important issues of public concern are not being discussed or planned for by ODA and state agencies in a coordinated fashion with impacted local governments pertaining to increased urban-level activities without municipal governance occurring at the Aurora State Airport, which is located in Oregon's best farmland of French Prairie.

### Core issues of important public concern include:

- **Unfunded surface-transportation impacts and increased traffic congestion:** Roads in the vicinity of the Aurora State Airport are generally older, unimproved farm-to-market roads that lack shoulders and sidewalks and have deep ditches. Developers at the airport pay a fraction of System Development Charges and related fees to improve local roads to accommodate more traffic compared to businesses in cities. Increased activity at the Airport creates more traffic that is not being planned for or mitigated in a coordinated fashion with local governments and other state agencies such as ODOT.

The Oregon Department of Transportation has estimated that total costs to improve surface transportation facilities just south of Wilsonville and the Willamette River, including the I-5 Boone Bridge traffic bottleneck area, exceeds \$500 million.

- **Dangerous, inequitable lack of alternative transportation options:** The Aurora State Airport is not served by any public-transit provider and local roads around the Airport lack bike lanes or sidewalks, which creates an unsafe situation for pedestrians and cyclists and places further auto traffic pressure on already crowded roads.
- **Unfair competition to adjacent local jurisdictions with state subsidy:** Businesses in the neighboring cities of Aurora, Canby, Donald, Hubbard, Woodburn and Wilsonville pay systems development charges and other taxes/fees that underwrite the costs of public infrastructure—such as roads, sidewalks, water, wastewater, stormwater, public transit service, etc.—that is lacking at the Aurora State Airport. By avoiding basic, core infrastructure costs of conducting commerce, the Aviation Department’s Aurora State Airport acts as an unfair public subsidy for select businesses.
- **Significant community environmental concerns** include groundwater and surface-stormwater water pollution, air pollution and noise pollution from airport-related operations. Toxic aviation gas fumes and lead deposits on area properties is a serious concern raised by neighbors of the Aurora State Airport, including the neighboring communities of Aurora and the Charbonneau District of Wilsonville.
- **Potential harm to the important agriculture economic cluster** brought about by increased real-estate land-speculation that raises the cost to buy or rent farmland. Increased traffic without funded mitigations further increases the difficulty of conducting farming operations efficiently and safely. Over 600 jobs in agriculture and food-processing of the Aurora-Tualatin-Wilsonville economy are directly dependent on farming operations in French Prairie near the Aurora State Airport — EFU lands rated top-quality ‘foundational’ by the Oregon Department of Agriculture.
- **Oregon land-use law calls for urban-level activities to occur in cities**, which provide municipal governance and supporting public infrastructure—and *not* in unincorporated county lands. The Oregon Department of Aviation’s push to conduct urban-level activities by expanding the Aurora State Airport without municipal governance and supporting public infrastructure is contrary to the intent and objectives of Oregon land-use law.
- **Efforts to expand the Aurora State Airport contradict Oregon Climate Action Goals** by advocating for increased aviation activity that generates substantial carbon and lead emissions that contribute to global warming.
- **Aurora State Airport Rated Low Priority in Oregon Resilience Plan, Inoperable After Earthquake:** The Aurora State Airport is listed at the lowest-level of Tier 3 airports in the Oregon Resilience Plan. Reports by the Oregon Department of Geology and Mineral Industries (DOGAMI) show that the Airport is located in an area subject to major potential damage in a projected 9.0 Cascadia Subduction Zone Earthquake “Rated High for Ground Shake Amplification and Amplification Susceptibility” and “Rated Moderate to High for Liquefaction Susceptibility.” As a result of such an earthquake, the Airport runway is likely unusable for as extended period (6-12 months). Rather than allow aircraft to take off or land due to an inoperable runway, a more likely scenario of the Airport is to accommodate vertical take-off and landing of heavy-lift helicopters with locally-based Columbia Helicopters and Helicopter Transport Services, neither of which require a runway extension to operate.

## Online References

[Wilsonville Mayor Knapp Letter to Legislators to Correct Record of Sept. 26 E-Board Meeting and Provide Information on Long-Running Public Controversy over Aurora State Airport Expansion, Oct. 2018](#)

[PSU Oregon Solutions, Aurora State Airport Assessment Report, Dec. 2018](#)

[ODA 2012 Aurora State Airport Master Plan](#)