

Seattle City Light Comments on King County International Airport's Airport Master Plan Update

11/30/2020

1) Context of Seattle City Light's Comments

Seattle City Light has been the owner and steward of the Georgetown Steam Plant (GTSP) since the 1950's. However, the GTSP has been an icon in the Georgetown neighborhood since 1906 – several years before the first powered flight in the State of Washington, and of course, well before there was a Boeing Field. GTSP is one of a small handful of buildings in Seattle that have been recognized as a National Historic Landmark.

Boeing Field's expansion over the years has resulted in increasing interactions between King County International Airport (KCIA) and City Light about the GTSP. In particular, since before 2001 there has been an effort to resolve issues of City Light's access to the GTSP.

In 2001, KCIA unilaterally eliminated City Light's legal access to the GTSP via 13th Ave S, providing a circuitous and inadequate "temporary" access. The FAA found that this access change constituted an adverse impact on the National Historic Landmark GTSP under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. City Light has been trying since then to acquire adequate permanent access to the GTSP.

The 2004 Airport Master Plan (AMP) EIS in the project website makes several references to the effort to resolve this situation:

"Separate from the Master Plan recommendations, King County is working with Seattle Light concerning improved access to the Georgetown Steam Plant. Currently, City Light has an easement through the secure portions of the airfield – through the north RPZ. King County is proposing to acquire the easement interests and to coordinate a land exchange between the County, Boeing Company, and Seattle Light that would enable direct access to the Steam Plant property from Ellis Avenue." [p. 12 of the EIS]

*"Separate from the Master Plan recommendations, King County is working with Seattle Light concerning **improved access driveway to the Georgetown Steam Plant**. Currently, City Light has an easement through the secure portions of the airfield of the north Runway Protection Zone. King County is proposing to acquire the easement interests and to coordinate a land exchange between the County, Boeing Company, and Seattle Light that would enable direct access to the Steam Plant property from Ellis Avenue. The County expects to complete all requisite NEPA and SEPA analysis on this access plan once the driveway access plan has been fully developed. A temporary access driveway has been developed to address short-term runway safety area concerns, while the permanent driveway is being developed."* [p. 43 of the EIS]

“King County is developing a program of land exchange that would provide an improved driveway access to the Steam Plant from Ellis Avenue in exchange for its release of easement and ownership interests.” [p. 115 of the EIS]

These references reflected an upbeat and optimistic attitude at that time that the issue would be readily resolved. KCIA entered into a Letter of Intent with City Light in 2019 which, while not being legally binding, set out the terms for a final settlement. Similarly, about the same time KCIA, City Light, FAA and Federal, state, and local historic preservation agencies entered into a Memorandum of Agreement which covered the terms to resolve the Section 106 impact on the GTSP. Unfortunately, 16 years after the EIS was written and 19 years after the legal access was removed, the issue of permanent access to the GTSP has not been resolved.

In summary, City Light recognizes the importance of the Airport for the region’s economy. But despite this, KCIA cannot leave the impacts of its development and operations unaddressed. It needs to resolve unmitigated impacts of its past expansions before it embarks on additional expansion. This includes resolving the issue of permanent acceptable access to the historic GTSP. City Light stands ready to complete a final settlement agreement with KCIA consistent with the agreed upon terms as outlined in the LOI and the FAA MOA.

In the meantime, we continue with our comments on this Airport Master Plan Update.

2) Issues of accuracy and clarity.

All figures in Chapters D and F are missing, including, Fig. F-2 Airport Layout Plan Drawing. Meaningful public comment is not possible, especially in a highly technical area such as airport planning, without graphics. Part of the controlling documents for the Airport are the figures, not text documents, so the public cannot understand what the Airport is proposing, committing to, or being held to without complete diagrams. This Airport Master Plan process has been going on for at least 4 ½ years; it is unreasonable to skimp on the information to the public at the end of the process just to save a few weeks. The full document including all the figures should be provided and a completely new public comment period established.

Figs. A 3,4,5,and 7 show the GTSP as an on-airport building, and p. A-58 describes the GTSP as being within BFI, while p. E-13 says the GTSP is “not located on Airport property.” Please state clearly that the GTSP is immediately adjacent to, and is not, and has never been, on KCIA property.

P. A-58 and numerous other locations in the various documents describe the GTSP as a Registered Historic Site. The GTSP should be described more accurately as a National Historic Landmark – a designation which indicates a much higher value as an historic resource, than one that is just registered.

On p. xxxviii of the summary, the following item is listed:

“Future RPZ Use Agreement:

- Runway 14R approach RPZ – 1.3 acres”

What does this mean? Does this mean that KCIA is seeking a use agreement for 1.3 acres in the (alleged) RPZ? Where? With whom? Under what terms?

P. C-37 includes: “Further consideration will be given to the options the Airport has in regard to achieving full control of all RPZ’s.”

What are those options? Do they include condemnation? If so, please make clear whether, in the County’s view, this would also include the ability for King County to condemn city property.

P. D-19 includes: “GTSP property @1.9 acres...approximately 1.9 acres to the north...is recommended for future RPZ easement or property acquisition to provide King County with land use controls.”

Please indicate which specific properties are recommended for which means of providing KCIA “with land use controls.”

On p. D-69, the CDP summary says “RW 14R RPZ – 1.0 acres (To be acquired)”.

Which 1.0 acres? Acquired by what means?

On p. E-8, it states: “the 300 foot- Runway 14R extension ... would change access.”

For what facility or entity would access be changed? How?

On p. xxxv of the summary, there is the following item: **“Runway Protection Zones (RPZs)**. The size of both approach and departure RPZ’s for Runway 14L are to be maintained at 1,000 feet x 1,510 feet x 1,700 feet and...”

We believe this should read “14R”, not “14L”.

On p. D-57, for Alternative One, the chart states “no change” in RPZ. However, RPZ Easement/Property Acquisition line in the chart shows “significant change”.

This is just one example of the confusion in the documents about whether the RPZ in Alternatives One, Two and Four is the existing condition, or in fact a change in the baseline which is the approved 2004 AMP. In any event, there is an inconsistency within this chart.

On the chart on p. D-59, Environmental issues should read “possible incompatible land use/NHRP property”

On p. F-4, we believe that the Runway Protection Zones section is meant to apply to 14R, not 14L

Page 109 of the 2004 AMP EIS includes this reference: *“The steam plant was inactivated in 1977. It is currently owned by Seattle City Light and managed by the Georgetown Powerplant Museum as a museum and educational facility, with a broad variety of uses. It is used regularly for tours and training classes in boiler operations and related topics.”*

This is accurate and we appreciate KCIA’s recognition that museum activities are a long-standing feature of City Light’s use of the GTSP.

P. A-40 describes that the City of Seattle’s Airport Height Overlay District “shall not restrict heights in Transition Areas to less than 37 feet (37’)”.

This is accurate. However, the document should further educate the reader that this is the only applicable height regulation in that area for non-airport property.

3) The issue of the appropriate baseline for the 14R approach RPZ.

The 2004 adopted Airport Master Plan is helpfully provided in the project website. Table C-2 of that document specifies that the dimensions of the 13R RPZ are 500 ft X 1700 ft X 1,010 ft (13R was, of course, the old designation of the runway now called 14R). Diagrams in the 2004 AMP also show that this RPZ does not include any part of City Light’s property around the GTSP.

A multitude of documents included in the present Master Plan Update website show that something has changed. The “existing” 14R approach RPZ is described as 1,000 ft X 1,510 ft X 1,700 ft. Dozens of text and diagrammatic references show that this RPZ now overlaps a good portion of City Light’s GTSP property.

But the documents are not completely consistent in this view. For instance, on p. D-27, the “existing” ¾ mile, 1,000/1,510/1,700 RPZ is mentioned as possibly requiring an EA and Section 106 consultation. On p. D-28, Alternative One’s disadvantages for the “existing” ¾ mile visibility and RPZ are indicated as requiring additional planning as well as the preparation of an Environmental Assessment and a Section 106 consultation.

If the “existing” RPZ had been appropriately approved and established, why would these additional planning/regulatory/consultation steps be necessary? One is drawn to infer that the “existing” RPZ is not, in fact, properly established or approved and is in fact not the existing baseline at all.

The statement on p. D-5 provides some helpful information:

“It has been confirmed through this planning process that the previous review of these non-standard conditions, which were documented in previous planning documents (i.e., the 2004 NEPA ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT/SEPA ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT FOR PROPOSED MASTER PLAN IMPROVEMENTS AT BFI and the 2006 MODIFICATION OF STANDARDS ALTERNATIVE ANALYSIS document for BFI)

and recorded as Modification of Standards (MOS) on the approved 2007 Airport Layout Plan Drawing Set were never “officially” approved by FAA.”

Supposedly the creation of an expanded RPZ is documented in these documents. The 2004 NEPA EA/ SEPA EIS is provided on the project website but no mention is made there (nor in the adopted 2004 AMP) of an expanded RPZ. One is left to conclude that the 2006 MOS Alternative Analysis and the approved 2007 Airport Layout Plan Drawing set document this RPZ expansion, but that is not clear because they are not provided on the project website.

Please provide these documents on your website (and allow for an extended public comment period once the complete documents are provided.)

Please state clearly if KCIA is relying on these documents to establish that the RPZ shown as “existing” in this Update was properly approved by FAA. If that is KCIA’s contention, please explain why your document on p. D-5 states that the 2006 MOS and 2007 ALP drawing set were “never ‘officially’ approved by FAA.”

Please provide the NEPA, SEPA, and Section 106 documentation that shows that proper environmental compliance was done by KCIA and FAA for any asserted expansion of the RPZ subsequent to 2004.

A reference on p. D-25 states:

“The encroachment of the Runway 14R approach RPZ onto adjacent property associated with the Georgetown Steam Plant (a structure listed on the National Register of Historic Properties) is a result of the existing ¾ mile visibility minimums...Due to the fact the existing 2007 Airport Layout Plan (ALP) identifies only 1 mile visibility minimums for the existing and future Runway 14R IAPs, additional environmental coordination and documentation would be required to consider the various environmental impact categories...to support the larger Runway 14R approach requirements.”

This also states that the 2007 ALP is the “existing” plan, which is problematic. It also leaves a little more confusion of whether the 2007 ALP has a 1-mile visibility requirement (small RPZ) or a ¾ mile visibility requirement (bigger RPZ.) It does indicate that there are presently unperformed environmental coordination and documentation requirements that are necessary to establish the larger RPZ. This reinforces our inferences drawn from pp. D-27 & 28.

There is a reference on p. E-9 to the “the FAA approved Airport Layout Plan (King County 2012).” What is this document? Is it the 2007 ALP? If so, why is it described as “approved” when on p. D-5 it is described never having been “officially” approved by FAA. What is the King County 2012 reference?

Given all the above, including KCIA’s statement on p. D-5, please explain how KCIA can assert that the 1,000/1,510/1,700 RPZ can be viewed as the “existing” RPZ.

It is clear that the existing RPZ and the true baseline, is in fact the 500 ft X1700 ft X1,010 ft RPZ adopted as part of the 2004 AMP. The Master Plan Update documents should be revised to reflect that and all necessary SEPA, NEPA and Section 106 compliance must be done before considering any expansion of this RPZ. The impacts of any RPZ expansion should be measured against the adopted 2004 AMP RPZ.

On a related note, references on pp. E-8 &9 state that “one NHRP-registered historic site, the Georgetown Steam Plant is potentially impacted by the 300 foot- Runway 14R extension, which would reposition the Runway 14R RPZ to encompass less of the Steam Plant property than under existing conditions.” Given the conclusion above, the 300 foot 14R extension (if done in conjunction with a $\frac{3}{4}$ mile visibility requirement) would also impact the GTSP property more than the true 2004 baseline.

4) Future studies/agency coordination/planning/regulatory compliance

There are many references in the documents to additional studies and similar activities that are needed:

“To facilitate the MOS preparation effort, a supplemental planning study will be undertaken to further define the long-term improvement/resolution options (beyond the 20-year planning period of the Master Plan Update) for the Airport’s existing non-standard design conditions.” p. D-6

- **“Potential Compliance/Mitigation Options**

- *...undertake the required environmental documentation to address the location of the Georgetown Steam Plant within the Runway 14R approach RPZ.”* p. D-7

“...application of FAA’s Interim Guidance on Land Uses within a Runway Protection Zone could require additional environmental review and documentation to assess the land use compatibility of the Steam Plant” p. D-9

“may require additional environmental documentation and approvals to support and retain the $\frac{3}{4}$ mile visibility minimums.” p. D-18

“Subsequent to the preparation of this draft chapter, the decision was made to retain the existing IAP visibility minimums and address the existing RPZ land use compatibility issues in a supplemental study to the Master Plan Update.” p. D-9 footnote

“Hot Spot #1. A new EA may be required to change the PPRP designation.” p. D-12

“Subsequent to the preparation of this draft chapter during the MP update, the FAA elected to address the land use compatibility guidance from the Interim Guidance on Land Uses within a Runway Protection Zone in a separate follow up study to the MP Update.” p. D-18 footnote 5.

There are two problems with these statements. The first is that they are mostly unclear about the nature of the action that is being recommended. Are these supposed to be Section 106 consultations? NEPA EA's? SEPA analysis? When they refer to "studies" what is being proposed to be studied? Also, in what way can these actions resolve the incompatibility of a use on non-airport property which KCIA is seeking to include in an expansion of the RPZ? IS KCIA considering attempting to restrict City Light's property rights?

The second problem is the implication that all these activities should be done after this AMP is adopted by the County and the ALP is approved by the FAA. If this is correct, then it leaves questions about mitigation and resolution of these potential impacts until after the main decisions are made. This is not the correct approach to SEPA and NEPA. Full environmental compliance (including SEPA and NEPA) should be done before the AMP and ALP are recommended for adoption or approval. If the AMP and ALP are considered programmatic decisions rather than project decisions, then SEPA and NEPA compliance (and Section 106 compliance and noise compliance) should be done on the programmatic decisions. And as we commented above, mitigation and resolution of impacts from past KCIA actions should be completed before a decision is made to create any new impacts from further Airport expansion.

Also, on p. E-8 indicates that *"It is recommended that BFI and King County continue to coordinate with Steam Plant representatives about the compatibility of the Steam Plant within the RPZ."* What does this mean? City Light has been negotiating with KCIA about the Airport's impacts on GTSP for 19 years now with no final resolution in sight. Please explain the basis for the assumption that continued coordination will resolve issues arising from further RPZ expansion.

5) Other comments

There are several references to Assumptions and Goals in the documents:

"Assumption Four. The fourth assumption is to encourage the protection of existing public and private investment in land and facilities and advocate the resolution of any potential land use conflicts, both on and off airport property." [p. xxxiv]

"Goal 6: Communications and Community Partnerships

Neighborhood & community. Act as a partner to neighboring residents, businesses and organizations." [p. A-3, pp. D-3 &4.]

We comment that KCIA's actions have not been consistent with this Assumption and this Goal.

On p. D-28 it states that Alternative One provides the opportunity to increase IFR access capability to Airport by 8.8 hours annually if the existing Runway 14R ILS can receive environmental clearance for the ¾ mile visibility minimum approach procedures.

Please state the baseline against which this 8.8 hour increase due to an expanded RPZ is measured. In other words, a 1-mile visibility gives X hours/year of runway use. A $\frac{3}{4}$ mile visibility requirement would give X + 8.8 hours of use. What is "X"? The Airport's general value to the local economy is clear, but please describe the incremental benefit to the economy of this additional 8.8 annual hours of operation in terms of jobs, \$ of economic activity, \$ of taxes generated, etc. We are assuming that KCIA must view these incremental benefits as substantial since they are driving a preference to expand the RPZ despite the well-documented land use incompatibility problems that flow from that preference.

The power point slide on Part 150 noise compares 2008 noise model results and 2018 noise model results. The proper baseline for noise impact analysis of the alternatives are that of the most recent data, not those of 12 years ago.

There are several references to the noise impact on the GTSP from PPRP conversion/runway extension (p. D-48, D-60, and E-8.) We remind KCIA that City Light has offered KCIA an aviation easement that would cover noise from normal operations of aircraft, subject to resolution of all other terms of a final access settlement. But since KCIA has not agreed to such a final settlement, then all legal requirements for noise analysis and mitigation need to be met prior to any decision to extend the runway and convert the PPRP.