

## Process for identifying most frequently asked questions

Questions were grouped by topic, then sorted by recurrence. The eight topics with the most questions are listed in highest occurrence to lowest:

- CACC's structure, representation, process
- Environmental concerns
- Location-specific questions
- Public outreach
- Coordination with federal agencies
- Capacity
- Infrastructure needs
- High speed rail

WSDOT selected the most frequently asked area of questioning within each of the topic areas above.

## Questions about CACC's structure, representation, process

**What's the current status of the process, and where and when can I expect to find an update?**

Information about the CACC's past and current work is available on the website at:

<https://wsdot.wa.gov/travel/aviation/commercial-aviation-coordinating-commission>

WSDOT staff send biweekly e-newsletters with updates about upcoming opportunities for engagement. [Sign up for e-newsletters here](#). Be sure to click the box next to "CACC" in the Construction, Planning & Projects section.

**What studies or analyses were used to arrive at this part of the process and where can I read/find them? What topics have the studies considered (or not considered) and why? What if I have a suggestion of a different study or report for the CACC to consider?**

The Legislature did not provide the CACC with a budget to hire contractors to develop a current analysis of the state's aviation system. However, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) provided WSDOT Aviation with funding to perform an update to the state's aviation system plan, and WSDOT staff used the opportunity to collect data that would support the CACC in identifying and evaluating potential locations for a new airport. You can read this update here:

[2022 Washington Aviation System Plan \(WASP\) Update](#)

This study considered several criteria for evaluating potential greenfield sites. Because further studies and reviews such as environmental impact studies and funding studies will have to take place after the Legislature decides on a specific airport location, this study reviewed the following criteria at a very high level:

- Airspace review – with help from the FAA
- Air cargo analysis
- Additional environmental factor analysis
- Transportation/access analysis
- Infrastructure analysis
- Rough order of magnitude (ROM) cost estimates

The Legislature tasked the CACC with identifying a possible site that will need more analysis. For example, the infrastructure analysis performed by the WASP will help the CACC understand what infrastructure exists on a site if any, and to figure out what the airport developer will have to think about if they decide to build an airport. Once a potential site has been selected, a different group of people than the CACC will do a much more detailed study of these topics.

The contractor who developed WASP also reviewed the following studies:

- 1992 Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) Flight Plan Report  
– email [cacc@wsdot.wa.gov](mailto:cacc@wsdot.wa.gov) if you would like a copy of this report.
- 2009 Long-Term Air Transportation Study (LATS)/Washington Aviation System Plan  
– email [cacc@wsdot.wa.gov](mailto:cacc@wsdot.wa.gov) if you would like a copy of this report.
- [2017 Washington Aviation System Plan \(WASP\) Update](#)
- [2018 Joint Transportation Committee \(JTC\) Air Cargo Movement Study](#)
- [2021 Puget Sound Regional Council \(PSRC\) Aviation Baseline Study](#)

If you have a suggestion about other studies that the CACC should consider, please email us with your suggestions at [cacc@wsdot.wa.gov](mailto:cacc@wsdot.wa.gov).

**Who is on the Commission and how were they chosen? Why is there such a focus on aviation professionals and why are broad community interests less represented?**

In 2019, the Legislature wrote instructions into the legislation that created the CACC to make sure that there were people from across the state making decisions about a future airport location. Because no work had been completed yet, they could not anticipate whether there would be specific environmental or social concerns, or what county, city, or neighborhood might be impacted by the Commission’s work. Therefore, they identified different types of knowledge and experience they thought might be helpful for the CACC to complete its work, relying on people who have worked in and around airports.

The legislation describes the types of backgrounds on who should be on the Commission. For example, the legislation states that one of the positions should be filled by a “representative of commercial service airports and ports from a county with a population of two million or more,” and others should be filled by “three representatives from an airline industry and private sector.”

The 27 members of the CACC are volunteers, meaning that no one is compensated for participation on the Commission. Funding, managed through WSDOT Aviation, was provided solely for the implementation of this project to include hiring consultants and public outreach.

- Information about the positions the Legislature required the CACC to fill are in [Section 2 of Senate Bill 5370-S](#). The Governor appointed 13 voting members to represent those 13 interests and the bill also states that the Governor may appoint additional nonvoting members as deemed appropriate.
- The names of people filling those positions are on this [list of Commission Members](#), and this document contains [commission members’ biographies](#).

When the CACC’s work is done, it will be up to the Legislature to name who should be involved with decision-making going forward.

## **When the CACC makes a recommendation about a site, will an airport be built there?**

The Commission could make a recommendation about a site to the State Legislature but does not have the power to say what happens next. Once the recommendation has been made, the State Legislature will make decisions about what to do next. Whether they choose to act on the recommendation, take no action, or do something else is up to them.

## **Environmental concerns**

### **How does Washington State's goal of building a new airport work alongside Washington State's climate goals?**

Very early in its process, the Commission adopted four fundamental planning principles to serve as the foundation of any recommendations it makes. One of the principles is **environmental responsibility**, defined by the Commission as the responsible interaction with the environment to avoid depletion or degradation of natural resources and allow for long-term environmental quality. The practice of environmental sustainability helps to ensure that the needs of today's population are met without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

Members of the CACC recognize that the future of aviation must include more sustainable technology. Two of our earliest recommendations were to:

1. Advance the development and use of Sustainable Aviation Fuels (SAF) as a bridging strategy while more advanced aircraft capable of significant emission and noise reductions are developed.
2. Support WSDOT's role in advancing aviation technology, including continuing the work of the [Electric Aircraft Working Group](#) and [Washington Electric Aircraft Feasibility Study](#).

In a statistically-representative survey conducted of western Washington residents and in the project's first online open house, many respondents said the State should meet the demand for aviation while minimizing impacts on the environment.

### **If the airport is sited in one of the proposed greenfield sites in Thurston or Pierce County, how will it prevent pollution of the water supply, and will it be competing with residents and wildlife for use of the water supply?**

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As the Commission has studied these sites more thoroughly, we learned that the Thurston County and Pierce County sites are on top of aquifers and the Nisqually River watershed. The CACC is also aware of the Medicine Creek Treaty which applies to the areas under consideration. The CACC presented to the Nisqually Tribal Council and have learned that the greenfield sites are near what had been the typical customary lands used by these tribal councils. They sit on top of that watershed. The Commission recognizes the importance of salmon recovery and historical rights of the Nisqually Tribe. This is something the Commission will consider at its next meeting. The environmental sensitivity of these areas may mean an airport cannot be sited there.

## Location-specific questions

**Where can I find information about why these sites were excluded from further study (e.g. King, Enumclaw, airports east of the Cascades, Snohomish, Skagit, Bremerton, Grant County/Moses Lake)? Why didn't you consider other places (Lewis County, places east of the Cascades)?**

The following reports outline the Commission's reasoning for considering or abandoning specific locations for consideration as airports. Many locations were considered over the past three years, and our staff cannot summarize each location. We recommend using the "Find" command to search the following documents for names of locations you are curious to learn more about:

- [CACC Status Report as of July 2020 \(PDF 716KB\)](#)
- [Phase I CACC Report Dec. 2020 \(PDF 210KB\)](#)
- [WASP Screening Process Aug. 2022 \(PDF 5.5MB\)](#)
- [CACC Report Oct. 2022 \(PDF 140KB\)](#)
- [CACC Report Feb. 2022 \(PDF 396KB\)](#)

### **Who should I contact if I have a suggested location?**

If you have a suggestion about other locations for the CACC to consider, please email us at [cacc@wsdot.wa.gov](mailto:cacc@wsdot.wa.gov). Please note that suggestions related to locations that have already been reviewed in one of the reports above are unlikely to be reconsidered, as are suggestions of locations that do not have local government support.

### **Why did you choose Thurston County and the two Pierce County sites for further study as greenfield sites?**

The term greenfield, as used by the Commission, refers to a location where an airport does not already exist. Greenfield sites are home to businesses, residents, and existing developed and undeveloped land.

The greenfield sites in Thurston and Pierce counties are being considered because the CACC has learned over time that the Puget Sound's existing airports cannot meet the expected need we have for an expected additional 27 million passengers and 800,000 pounds of cargo by 2050. When the CACC began its work in 2019, they looked at 19 existing airports to see if any of them could be expanded without having to build a new airport. Of the airports that wanted to grow and could, each one could only serve 4- to 6-million people. The CACC talked to different airline companies about whether they would be able to set up business at several different airports. The airline companies said it would not be profitable to start operating out of several smaller airports. The airlines said it is too costly and logistically challenging to have just a few planes, staff, and equipment in several different places. It is better for them to have a large number of staff and equipment in one or two locations.

When the CACC realized they couldn't meet capacity at existing airports, WSDOT asked a consultant they had hired to update the Washington System Aviation Plan to look at possible greenfield locations within 100 miles of Sea-Tac, and they identified ten possible greenfield sites in six counties. [Read an analysis of those sites in the 2022 WASP Airport Site Selection Study.](#)

In September 2022, the CACC narrowed the number of greenfield options provided by the consultant working on the aviation system plan to three (Thurston County, and two in Pierce County) based on the technical data available. The reason the CACC decided to continue to consider the three greenfield sites is because:

- These two counties have some of the highest populations in the state, meaning that the airport would be near many people who would use it.
- Previous studies have pointed to the need for an airport in both the northern and southern parts of Puget Sound to complement Sea-Tac. The CACC was ready to propose expanding Paine Field to the north, so they thought it made sense to continue looking at these counties as an option for the southern part of Puget Sound.
- The WASP analysis was not complete by the legislative deadline for creating a reduced list of locations for the legislature by October 2022. Since there were still three sites being analyzed, the CACC chose to continue to examine those three sites as one of the options.

## Communications

### Why wasn't there more outreach? What was the budget and timeframe for communications, and how did you prioritize spending?

Just as the CACC has had to adjust its workplan to meet the needs of the project, the community engagement has had to shift their strategies and tactics to effectively reach Washingtonians over the past three years. Our goal has been to reach the greatest number of people possible at every phase of the project, considering the areas the Commission was studying at any given point in time.

The legislature provided WSDOT with a budget of \$350,000 for the 2019-21 biennium to support the CACC. Funding for the new 2021-23 biennium is \$257,000 with an additional \$150,000 for community engagement for a total of \$407,000 which can be used only from July 1, 2021, through June 30, 2023.

Community engagement for this project had these goals (objectives):

- To inform and ensure understanding of the importance of proper aviation capacity in the state, the risks of not meeting future needs, and the potential environmental impacts of increased capacity.
- To clearly communicate the need for the CACC's recommendations.
- To inform and involve the community and all its various representative groups on the progress, impacts, and benefits of the CACC's recommendation.
- To foster sound development decisions and fully explore the needs of both airport users and adjacent communities.

The CACC also tasked community engagement consultants to help the Commission meet its social equity goal of making sure all people have fair access to opportunity, livelihood, and full participation in the political and cultural life of a community. Therefore, community engagement staff focused resources on translating into 12 languages, advertising to disproportionately impacted communities on social media, and engaging community-based organizations (CBOs) for our CBO working group.

Work phase	The CACC's focus	Community engagement during this phase
Phase 1 (Jan. 2019- Dec. 2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forming the Commission and adjusting work format to COVID-19</li> </ul>	Public communication activities included supplying public information about the CACC and its deliberations, and meetings of the CACC, which includes opportunities for public

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exploring opportunities for capacity expansion at 18 existing airports statewide</li> </ul>	<p>comment, focused on an audience across western Washington.</p> <p>In addition, outreach during this phase included: Project start up activities to identify stakeholders and develop systems for tracking public communications, website development, a one-pager summarizing Phase 1 activities, social media content, online advertising, a Seattle Times print advertisement, press releases issued to English- and Spanish-language media statewide, briefings with local government and industry stakeholders, a statistically-representative random sample survey, an online open house, and identification and recruitment of members for the initial meeting of the community-based organization working group.</p>
<p>Phase 2 (Dec. 2020 – Oct. 2022)</p>	<p>The CACC refined its list to two options through an evaluation of six potential existing sites and more greenfield locations.</p>	<p>Public communication activities included supplying public information about the CACC and its deliberations, and meetings of the CACC, which includes opportunities for public comment, focused on audiences near the six existing airport sites during the first part of the task, and on audiences near the 10 greenfield locations during the second part of the task.</p> <p>In addition, outreach during this phase included: A second online open house and a virtual public meeting to gather additional input, convening the CBO working group to advise on inclusive engagement strategies, developing content for the web, email listserv, social media content, online advertising, press releases issued to English- and Spanish-language statewide media, media interviews, and briefings.</p>
<p>Phase 3 (Oct. 2022 – present)</p>	<p>In addition to its technical review, the CACC will continue to seek public input in the preparation of its final recommendations and share news about the final recommendations with audiences.</p>	<p>Ongoing outreach and updates about the CACC, including web and listserv updates and public meeting support, focused on audiences near the sites still being considered by the CACC.</p> <p>Additional outreach during this phase included: Support for virtual drop-in office hour sessions, a third online open house and virtual public meetings to share online open house content, support for the March Commission meeting, develop content for the website, email listserv, host continued meetings of the CBO working group, media interviews,</p>

		briefings, press releases issued to English- and Spanish-language statewide media, social media content, and online advertising.
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Many people have asked why the CACC did not send mailers to residents near the sites they were considering. Our contractor requested an estimate from a mail house for reaching all residents near the three greenfield sites and Paine Field using a direct mail single postcard. They received a quote for \$113,000. The team made the difficult decision to instead focus spending on a statistically representative public opinion survey, three online open houses, social media posting and online advertising, issuing press releases and participating in interviews, and hosting virtual drop-in sessions.

**What would you do differently with more funds?**

During Phase 2, the community engagement team recommended additional promotional activities, such as paid advertising, sending a mailer to addresses near the sites being studied, Spanish language media pitching, hanging informational posters near sites under study by the CACC, and providing print copies of the online open house at community gathering centers near sites under study by the CACC. The team also recommended holding in-person public meetings near the sites under consideration.

During Phase 3, the team worked to identify funding to translate the online open house and conduct social media advertising. The team also recommended additional promotional activities, such as paid advertising, sending a mailer to addresses near the sites being studied, Spanish language media pitching, hanging informational posters near sites under study by the CACC, and providing print copies of the online open house at community gathering centers near sites under study by the CACC. The team also recommended holding in-person public meetings near the sites under consideration.

**How have you worked with publications of record, the media, and community-based organizations to share information?**

The CACC has sent multiple press releases, in English and Spanish, to WSDOT’s comprehensive statewide media list. Commission members and WSDOT staff have responded to numerous media inquiries and have participated in many interviews.

Our email distribution list has 891 members, and WSDOT’s social media following on Facebook is approximately 187K followers.

The CACC invited over 40 community-based organizations to participate in a working group to discuss community engagement initiatives and planning over the last year. Organizations that are located near locations being studied by the CACC are advising the engagement team on engagement strategies that would be effective in their communities.

**Coordination with federal agencies**

**How has Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM) been involved in discussions about the greenfield sites, and what impact does their feedback have on deliberations?**

JBLM assigned Robert Rodriguez, an aviation battalion officer, to serve as a non-voting member of the CACC. Mr. Rodriguez pays attention to the CACC and ensures that members of JBLM’s senior leadership are fully informed about CACC activities. He has also shared JBLM’s comments about the greenfield sites with the CACC. The CACC has also engaged with military airspace planners from

JBLM, Whidbey Island, and the FAA to review high-level overviews of airspace. JBLM understands the challenges related to the high number of airports using the airspace.

### **How does federal feedback from places like the FAA, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), National Parks Service, National Forest Service, and Department of Fish and Wildlife impact the decision?**

Technical input from partner agencies is critical to the CACC's work, especially because of our limited technical resources. We are grateful for input we have received from partners like the FAA and have incorporated that input into our study and recommendations.

The CACC's role is to help with planning, and it exists to gather and share information to identify what a site might be. It does not have executive or decision-making authority. The ultimate decision is up to the Washington State Legislature. If they decide to build an airport, they will work with government agencies at all levels, city, county, regional, other state, and federal governments.

## **Capacity**

### **Is passenger capacity really a problem?**

The CACC used numbers from the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) Regional Baseline Study and from the Washington Aviation System Plan (WASP) Update performed by consultants Kimley-Horn and Ricondo to get a better understanding of how many passengers and how much cargo might need to pass through Puget Sound's airport in the next 25 years. The fact that the estimates in these two studies, performed by different organizations, are so close gives us confidence that they are realistic.

Both studies showed that the number of passengers and amount of cargo may almost double from what travels through Sea-Tac today. The CACC estimates that the gap will be about 27 million passengers by 2050, with an additional 800,000 tons of cargo. Sea-Tac will run out of space by 2030, and that will be a problem in several ways:

- **For people who want to fly from or to the Puget Sound:** Being over capacity would mean more expensive flights, more challenges getting to and from the airport, more crowds in the airport and going through security, more flight delays. It also means that some people would have to travel to a different region to catch a flight or not fly.
- **For businesses and people shipping packages:** We rely on air cargo to receive goods, and existing facilities that receive and process air cargo are running out of space. Being over capacity would mean shipping is more expensive and shipping times are longer and less reliable.
- **For general aviation:** Airports need places to store planes and support vehicles. Being over capacity in general aviation means there wouldn't be enough hangar space, or room for planes used for critical services like emergency transport and firefighting.

In addition to estimating the future number of people and amount of cargo, the studies also gathered incredibly detailed information about who is traveling, where people live, where they're connecting, and where they are flying to and through. We've learned most capacity demand is in Puget Sound, and that cargo is flying to the parts of the state where the most people live. Also, most of the need is for domestic air travel, to areas outside of the Pacific Northwest.

Although it may be less expensive and impactful to buy land and build an airport in eastern Washington, the CACC must also consider data that says that most people and goods traveling by air have destinations in the Puget Sound area in western Washington.

### **What is the need for cargo capacity, and what have you considered to address it?**

The forecast need for additional cargo capacity is 800,000 tons – approximately double today’s cargo tonnage. A primary consideration in addressing this need is the recognition that a large percentage of cargo is not carried in cargo-only aircraft. Approximately 35-40% is carried in the cargo holds of passenger flights. A cargo-only airport therefore would not be able to meet 100% of cargo capacity needs because so much of it does travel via passenger aircraft. Accordingly, the industry will therefore not support a cargo-only airport. As a specific example, Korean Airlines operates both cargo-only and international passenger flights at Sea-Tac. It achieves significant economies of scale by using the same personnel, facilities, and aircraft support equipment to process both cargo and passenger operations. Such efficiencies would be lost at an all-cargo airport. Lastly, a 3,100-acre, two-runway airport envisioned as being able to meet the forecast passenger capacity need would also provide the necessary land to handle forecast cargo-handling operations.

## **Infrastructure needs**

### **What infrastructure would be needed to support an airport at the proposed greenfield sites?**

The CACC has not yet completed a thorough analysis of infrastructure that would be needed; however, this airport will need all of the things that any airport will need: water and sewer, electricity, transportation access, etc. The consultant updating the aviation system plan for WSDOT is researching the infrastructure that exists in the three sites and will provide that information in their report for the CACC to consider when making a recommendation to the legislature.

### **Why were infrastructure needs listed as a barrier for some sites previously, but not the current greenfield sites?**

The infrastructure needs for both existing airports and greenfield sites are very similar. Whatever differentiation there may be is simply a matter of scale, availability, and proximity. These vary considerably no matter whether an existing airport or a greenfield site is being studied. If there is one barrier that truly differentiates existing airports from greenfield sites, it is the amount of developable land at existing airports that could be immediately placed into airport service. Most existing airports have significant urban development surrounding them, minimizing the availability of contiguous undeveloped land that could add significantly to airport capacity. Existing airports are therefore constrained to a restrictive maximum size. A greenfield site away from the urban cores however creates the potential for a fully capable 3,100-acre, two-runway airport that existing airports cannot achieve.

## **What about high-speed rail?**

### **Could the state consider pairing high-speed rail and an airport to address the capacity problem?**

The state could certainly consider how high-speed rail and an airport could work together; however, they have not assigned the CACC to work on that. The CACC’s job is to locate a site for a new airport.

WSDOT, in cooperation with British Columbia and the State of Oregon, has studied high-speed rail between Vancouver, BC, Seattle, and Portland, OR. The first big factor is that high-speed rail would serve only those major cities and not destinations around the country as an airport would.

In 2019, WSDOT conducted an Ultra-High-Speed Ground Transportation Business Case Analysis. That study and subsequent work by the Puget Sound Regional Council found that high-speed rail would only solve a small fraction of the gap in demand: Only about 4.3% of passengers who board a plane at Sea-Tac are headed to destinations that would be served by high-speed rail. The projected gap in capacity is about 100% of passengers currently served by Sea-Tac.

Many of the travelers who would use high-speed rail travel in their personal vehicles or on existing train and bus routes today, rather than by air. High-speed rail would also not address the gap in capacity for air cargo.

**Where can I find out more about the state’s high-speed rail plans, and who can I contact if I want to support those efforts?**

- WSDOT is doing a planning study to develop an approach for future high-speed rail work. Learn about the study on its [ultra-high speed rail study webpage](#).
- You may also contact your legislators directly on this topic. [Enter your address on the Washington State Legislature District Finder webpage](#) to find contact information for legislators representing you.
- There are also several non-profit organizations such as Cascadia Rail and the US High Speed Rail Association advocating for high-speed rail. An internet search for “Washington high speed rail” should provide helpful information.