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Snohomish County opinion **No Paine, no gain**

By Hans Toorens
Special to The Times

Air transportation has been developed and accepted by worldwide communities as one of the most efficient modes of transportation and infrastructure in support of economic growth, tourism and prosperity. Cities and regions implementing commercial-airline capabilities have historically enjoyed above-average economic and employment growth.

With a rapidly growing population in Snohomish County and deteriorating access to Sea-Tac International Airport, businesses and residents in Snohomish County are at a disadvantage. Travel times from Snohomish County to Sea-Tac have increased to unacceptable levels, are unpredictable and at times well over two hours each way. According to a market study completed in 2004, an average of 7,000 passengers travel each way between Snohomish County and Sea-Tac Airport every day. Excessive travel times represent significant losses in productivity and quality of life. Companies presently located in Snohomish County suffer from this loss in productivity.

Snohomish County is the owner of Paine Field Airport. Although acquired in 1946, sustainable commercial air service is yet to be implemented despite a recent (2004) market study that strongly indicates that a viable market does exist.

Recent evaluation of passenger traffic data at Sea-Tac has revealed that, of the roughly 30 million passengers at Sea-Tac, 73 percent are origin and destination passengers in the Puget Sound region.

Of these, some 21 percent originate or have their destination in the North Puget Sound area: north of the Ship Canal, Lake Union, Lake Washington and Kirkland. Most drive in single-occupancy vehicles. It is reasonable to assume that 10 to 15 percent of these travelers could fly out of, or into, Paine Field once service is established to most-frequent destinations along the West Coast and one or two additional hubs.

This would make travel for 700 to 1,000 daily departing passengers and another 700 to 1,000 daily arriving passengers more convenient, quicker, more hassle-free and efficient. It would also reduce car congestion, pollution, road rage and accidents.



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Using Paine Field for commercial passenger flights would benefit Snohomish County.



Hans Toorens

Paine Field is a county asset that is vastly underutilized. Economic data suggest that 10 flights alone could add close to \$150 million in wages and salaries, \$240 million in business revenues and \$24 million in taxes to the region every year.

With its three runways, one of which is 9,000 feet long, there is no need to expand the airport. Just use it. A small terminal and parking facilities fit on the existing terrain.

In support of building an effective air-transportation infrastructure, the Federal Aviation Administration has enacted the Airport Noise and Capacity Act (ANCA), forcing the air-transportation industry to develop and invest in lower-noise aircraft than were in use in the late 1970s and 1980s. Indeed, the Boeing 727, delivered between 1963 and 1984 and often called the noisiest jetliner in the world, is now gone from American skies.

ANCA took effect on Dec. 31, 1999, banning stage 2 or earlier jet aircraft from the 48 contiguous states, in exchange for improved access to existing airports. In other words, all commercial aircraft of more than 75,000 pounds operating today are stage 3 or quieter, and present production meets stage 4 requirements.

To sum up the benefits of bringing commercial service to Snohomish County:

- Air service at Paine Field will help bypass the gridlock for thousands of passengers each way;
- Regional air service at Paine Field will position Snohomish County as a good place to keep or expand existing businesses or establish new business activities;
- Growing high-value businesses that pay higher wages improves the overall economy of the region, allowing more disposable income for residents to be spent on discretionary items such as cars, dining out, theater visits and other entertainment;
- As a destination airport, Paine Field will open up or "unlock" the potential of Snohomish County as a destination for tourists seeking scenery, wildlife cruises, mountaineering, skiing, destination resorts and entertainment.

All of the above contributes to the county's tax system, allowing further improvements for infrastructure, education, health and other county services and adding to the region's prosperity, property values and quality of life.

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