

HeraldNet

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Snohomish County needs airline service

By [Julie Muhlstein](#), Herald Columnist

Walla Walla, Pasco, Pullman, Yakima.

Lewiston, Idaho. Kalispell, Mont. Klamath Falls, Ore.

Shall I go on? Fine.

Minot, N.D. Tupelo, Miss. Sioux City, Iowa.

The official code for Sioux City Gateway Airport is an unflattering letter combo, SUX -- but at least the place has an airport.

By now you may have guessed the point of my 10-city list. Each of these cities has a population of well under 100,000 people. And each has an airport served by at least one commercial airline.

An hour north of Everett on I-5, the Bellingham International Airport is served by four airlines: Allegiant Air, Delta Air Lines' feeder SkyWest Airlines, Horizon Air and San Juan Airlines. From Bellingham (population about 70,000), you can fly to Las Vegas or Reno, Nev.; Palm Springs, Calif.; Salt Lake City; the San Juan Islands; British Columbia; and Seattle-Tacoma International Airport.

From Snohomish County (population 676,000, according to U.S. Census Bureau estimates reported in March), you can't fly anywhere, not commercially.

I've written before about commercial flights at Paine Field. For the record, I am strongly in favor of the Snohomish County Airport being our airport, a place to hop a flight without spending half a day traveling south of Seattle.

The hot-button airport issue has been back in the news since Allegiant Air sent a letter to Snohomish County last week raising anew the specter of commercial jets at Paine Field. Plans initially call for up to four flights per week to Las Vegas.

Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon and three Snohomish County Council members, including Brian Sullivan, Mukilteo's former mayor, were quick to speak out against the proposal, a position long held by the anti-airport group Save Our Communities.

Foes fear that quality of life will be eroded in areas around Paine Field, particularly in Mukilteo, Lynnwood and Edmonds. Worries include jet noise and declining property values.

I would understand these arguments better if plans called for building a new airport in a place where one never existed. The Snohomish County Airport opened in 1939. By the early 1940s, it was Paine Field Air Force Base.

Browsing single-family Mukilteo homes in The Herald's online classified ads Thursday, I couldn't find much for under a half-million dollars. That's with whatever noise that flights out of Paine Field already generate.

Quality of life means different things to different people.

In a county covering 2,090 square miles -- that's larger than either Rhode Island or Delaware -- access to travel options should be part of any quality-of-life equation. We all know how much time it takes to get to Sea-Tac.

We may see ourselves as thriving, but my parents in Spokane view Everett as a bit of a backwater because they can't fly here to visit. If that's what my 85-year-old parents think, imagine how business interests elsewhere see

Snohomish County.

The most baffling statement in the recent debate came from Greg Hauth. The Mukilteo man is president of Save Our Communities. In Saturday's Herald, he countered any argument that commercial flights at Paine Field would help this county's economy.

"They're just going to export gamblers who should be going to the Tulalip Casino and ship them out of the area," Hauth was quoted as saying. That's like Seattle civic leaders saying locals ought not to visit the Eiffel Tower because Seattleites should be going to the Space Needle.

The Tulalip Tribes' 370-room luxury hotel is set to open next month. Do you suppose those high-end rooms will be filled only by locals? Flights do go both ways, bringing people here as well as taking people away. When it's hotter than July in Vegas, wouldn't people there jump at the chance to fly north?

The Web site for the Snohomish County Tourism Bureau, www.snohomish.org, lists events likely to draw visitors in the months ahead. There's the Tulalip Resort's opening, the 100th birthday of the Evergreen State Fair and the Skate America competition.

There's a motto, too, calling Snohomish County "Close to everything. Far from ordinary." That's half right. It's far from ordinary to be this big with no commercial airport. Close to everything? No, we're a long way from Sea-Tac.

Under "Getting There," the site lists seven airports: Paine Field, Martha Lake Airport in Lynnwood, Harvey Airfield in Snohomish, Sky Harbor Airport in Sultan, Arlington Airport, Darrington Airport and First Airfield in Monroe.

Great, if you've got a plane handy. Most of us don't. And we shouldn't plan to fly out of here any time soon.

This county lacks not only airline service, but the political courage to bring it here.

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