

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

The City of St. George has devoted extensive study and effort to the consideration of the development of the proposed replacement airport since the mid-1990s. This chapter reviews the most significant of those undertakings.

2.1 1998 SITE SELECTION AND MASTER PLAN STUDY

The *1998 Site Selection and Master Plan Study*¹ (*1998 Master Plan*) was conducted to determine the feasibility of continuing the use of the existing St. George Municipal Airport (SGU) as compared to replacing the airport at a new site. The *1998 Master Plan* identified design deficiencies at the existing airport, concluded that the airport could not accommodate forecast future demand at its present site, and evaluated potential replacement sites in the vicinity of the existing airport.

The *1998 Master Plan* identified six potential replacement sites in the St. George vicinity. Based upon evaluation of each identified potential replacement site, the *1998 Master Plan* recommended that three of those sites be removed from consideration due to limitations of the natural terrain, runway orientation constraints, or distance from the City of St. George to the site. The remaining three sites were recommended for further evaluation and analysis as potential replacement sites for the airport.

2.2 2001 ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT RECORD OF DECISION/FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

After completion of the *1998 Master Plan*, the City began to pursue development of a replacement airport that would meet FAA design standards and accommodate, in a safe and efficient manner, forecast demand for passenger enplanements. In order to move toward this objective, the City prepared a Draft Environmental Assessment (DEA)², which evaluated fifteen potential airport replacement sites, including the six initial sites identified by the *1998 Master Plan*.

A screening analysis reduced the list of potential sites to six. After further analysis, three of the six sites were removed from consideration because they were not capable of meeting safety and design standards required for the desired runway approach. The DEA then cataloged the environmental conditions and evaluated potential environmental consequences of developing a replacement airport at each of the three remaining alternative sites. The DEA concluded with an identification of a preferred site.

¹ *Site Selection and Master Plan, St. George Municipal Airport*, prepared by Creamer & Noble Engineers and Barnard Dunkelberg & Company. October 1998.

² *Record of Decision for a Proposed Replacement Airport at St. George, Utah, Washington County, Utah*. U.S. Department Of Transportation, Federal Aviation Administration, and Northwest Mountain Region. January 30, 2001.

The DEA was released on June 16, 2000 for a 45-day public comment period. A public hearing on the DEA was held in St. George on July 18, 2000. Comments on the DEA reflected concerns for several environmental issues, with a primary focus on potential noise impacts of the project upon Zion National Park, which is located 26 miles northeast of the preferred site identified in the DEA. Additional concerns related to potential noise effects to the community of Washington City, which is immediately north of the preferred site, were reflected in comments.

On January 30, 2001, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) issued a Record of Decision (ROD)/Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the development of a replacement airport at St. George, Utah. The Final Environmental Assessment (2001 FEA)³ addressed each area of public and agency concern through modifications to the text of the DEA or by specific responses to written comments submitted during the public comment period.

2.3 PETITION FOR REVIEW OF FAA'S ROD/FONSI

On April 22, 2001, the Grand Canyon Trust filed suit against the FAA in the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit⁴, petitioning for review of the FAA decision to approve the Federal actions necessary to allow the City of St. George to develop a replacement airport.

The Grand Canyon Trust challenged the adequacy of the 2001 FEA and the FAA's conclusion that there would be no significant environmental impacts from the project.⁵ Focusing on the potential noise impacts on Zion National Park, the Grand Canyon Trust principally contended that the FAA failed to adequately consider the cumulative impact of noise from all sources on the natural quiet of Zion National Park and instead, the 2001 FEA addressed only the incremental impact of the proposed replacement airport.

On May 24, 2002, the court issued its decision, stating that the FAA must evaluate the cumulative impact of noise on Zion National Park as a result of development of the proposed replacement airport, in light of the following:

- Air traffic near and over Zion National Park
- Air tours near or in Zion National Park
- Acoustical data collected by the National Park Service (NPS) in Zion National Park in 1995 and 1998, which was mentioned in the NPS's comments on the DEA.

³ *Final Environmental Assessment for the Proposed Replacement Airport at St. George, Utah.* Prepared by Creamer & Noble, Engineers and Barnard Dunkelberg & Company. January 30, 2001.

⁴ United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. Argued April 11, 2002. Decided May 24, 2002 No. 01-1154. Grand Canyon Trust, Petitioner v. Federal Aviation Administration, Respondent. On Petition for Review of an Order of the Federal Aviation Administration.

⁵ Challenge brought under s 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) and 42 U.S.C. s 4332(C) (1970).

The court remanded the case to the FAA because it found that the Administrative Record was insufficient for the court to determine whether an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was required.

2.4 FAA ACTION SINCE COURT DECISION

In response to the Court's order, the FAA decided to prepare a complete EIS for the proposed project. In the October 7, 2002 *Federal Register*, the Northwest Mountain Region Airports Division of the FAA, acting as lead agency, announced its Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS⁶ for the development of a replacement airport at St. George, Utah. Two other announcements followed in the October 31, 2002 and November 7, 2002 issues of the *Federal Register* to clarify the original Notice. (See **Appendix K, Notice of Intent to Prepare an EIS and Scoping Comments**).

2.5 PURPOSE OF THIS DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

The purpose of this EIS is to provide a clear, concise, and appropriately detailed document that provides the agency decision-makers and the public with a full and fair discussion of the potential for significant environmental impacts of the proposed replacement airport and reasonable alternatives.⁷

As prescribed in FAA Order 1050.1E, *Environmental Impacts: Policies and Procedures*, the EIS describes the purpose and need of the proposed replacement airport, the affected environment, and, in a comparative form, the potential environmental effects of the alternatives, including development of the proposed replacement airport and a no-action alternative.

This EIS also identifies possible conflicts between the proposed replacement airport and the objectives of Federal, regional, state, tribal, and local land use plans, policies, and controls for the area concerned, and the extent to which the FAA would reconcile its proposed action with the plan or law. The Preferred Alternative for the proposed replacement airport is described in this EIS, as well as the reasons why the other alternatives were eliminated from consideration.

This EIS also identifies methodologies and sources used; identifies where information is incomplete or unavailable; lists the preparers, agencies, organizations, and persons to whom copies of the EIS are sent; and summarizes the major conclusions and areas of controversy encountered through its preparation, including issues raised by agencies and the public, and issues to be resolved.⁸ The FAA's response to comments on the DEIS will be included in the Final EIS.

⁶ Department of Transportation Federal Aviation Administration, Notice of Intent to Prepare Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statement. Notices: Federal Register Vol. 67, No. 194, Monday, October 7, 2002, FR Doc. 02-25317. Notices: Federal Register Vol. 67, No. 211, Thursday, October 31, 2002, FR Doc. 02-27728. Notices: Federal Register Vol. 67, No. 216, Thursday, November 7, 2002, FR Doc. 02-28377.

⁷ 40 CFR 1502.1

⁸ 40 CFR 1502.9(b), 1502.10(i), 1502.12, 1502.13, 1502.14, 1502.15, 1502.16, 1502.17, 1502.22, 1502.24, 1503, 1506.2(d)

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK