

## **Logan report falls short**

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**A YEAR AGO**, when Federal Aviation Administration head Jane Garvey called on Mayor Menino and Governor Cellucci to assemble a panel to review the proposed new runway at Logan Airport, there was hope that the issue would get such a complete airing that all sides could be satisfied with the result. For that to happen, the drafters of the project's environmental impact report needed to give full and fair consideration to all possible alternatives for solving Logan's delay problem, including ways to curb peak-time congestion and a proposal for restricted use of the new runway.

Regrettably, the report issued last week fails on this score and is not likely to win over the mayor and other runway critics. A single all-day public hearing will be held April 25 at the Radisson Hotel on Stuart Street.

As this page said when Garvey pulled the panel together over a year ago, a case could be made for the runway, especially if its use is limited to the high northwest wind conditions for which it is designed. But by taking a blinkered approach to the delay issue, Massport misses an opportunity to enhance its own ability to manage growth at Logan.

Massport is essentially sticking to its three-decade old proposal for a short 5,000-foot runway at a time when the entire country is being forced by national near-gridlock to take a more encompassing approach. Within weeks, the FAA is expected to put on the table a menu of demand-control measures for New York's delay-plagued La Guardia. These solutions could become standard for other airports as well.

There are two delay-causing factors at Logan that most other airports do not face. One is its configuration of runways that, during high northwest winds, leaves just one or two runways available. The other is the airport's extremely high proportion of small commuter and personal or corporate planes, 42 percent of all traffic. These planes service fewer than 10 percent of all Logan passengers and slow operations because in landing patterns they must be spaced farther behind the turbulence-causing wake of any big jet ahead of them.

The environmental report ducks the issue of taking any action to reduce puddle-jumper congestion by claiming that over-scheduling is simply not one of the reasons that Logan has the country's sixth worst delay problem. It claims Logan officials rarely schedule more than the stated capacity of 120 takeoffs and landings an hour. But the runway problems and a taxiway limitation make practical capacity less than 120 much of the time.

Massport's analysis of Logan-caused delays attributes 25 percent of them to northwest winds and says the new runway and other improvements will eliminate about 29 percent. This still leaves passengers with a huge part of the delay problem unsolved.

Back in September, the Garvey panel heard from Amadeo R. Odoni, the T. Wilson Professor of Aeronautics and Astronautics at MIT, who said that the delay-reduction benefit of the new runway would be real but temporary, as demand grows and congestion worsens. He gave high marks to peak-period pricing as a delay-fighter, saying that a 1 percent reduction in flights could reduce delays by 7 percent.

But the runway report relegates peak pricing to some future possibility, even though the new US transportation secretary, Norman Mineta, has spoken approvingly of it. If Massport inaugurated this - or some other demand-control measure - now, it could signal

airlines to plan their future purchases of aircraft knowing that Logan will be pushing for a fleet of fewer, bigger craft.

The report gives even shorter shrift to the proposal to restrict use of the runway to days with heavy northwest winds, not granting this the status of a formal alternative. But in an appendix, the report states that if the runway were limited to days with northwest winds of 10 knots or stronger, the delay-reduction benefit of the runway would drop only from 29 percent to 24 percent.

Massport Executive Director Virginia Buckingham says that a wind-restricted runway is "perhaps a compromise we can live with," although the agency is clearly not happy about giving up the 5 percentage points of delay reduction. Still, that would not be such a high price to pay if it bought the agency something that it has precious little of in its dealings with neighboring communities: credibility.

After years of broken promises by Massport, the wind restriction would give neighbors a way to ensure that the new runway is, as Massport contends, for delay reduction only and not to expand operations at Logan.

Claiming the runway is only for delay reduction permits Massport to present it as an environmental plus that will improve air quality by reducing fuel-wasting delays. Somehow, Massport wants the public to believe that a smoother-running Logan with the new airway and other improvements will not attract new business to the airport. In fact, the creation of a runway for the exclusive use of small planes could well lure more of them to Logan - and Massport does not have the legal standing to deny them.

If the improvements do boost total operations at Logan, the health and noise impact of the project change dramatically. This argues for Massport to wait until a state Department of Public Health study of the airport's effect on neighbors' health is completed.

Buckingham makes no bones about the fact that airport managers need more power in dealing with airlines - in Logan's case, to fulfill its primary purpose of serving international and long-haul domestic travel while shedding smaller-plane service. Until now, an agency that looks like Mike Tyson to its neighbors has been treated like a 90-pound weakling by the airlines. La Guardia's delay debacle is about to change that, however.

Massport will be a better steward of the public's right to fly safely and conveniently and of its neighbors' right to healthful and less noisy conditions once it has more power to control who uses Logan. In that environment, a compromise on a wind-restricted runway might get Massport and the communities to "yes."

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