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Growth Study set for Lancaster airport area

By Margaret Allen

With southern Dallas County poised for booming development, regional planners are looking at how the future build-out of homes, warehouses and retail shops might impact Lancaster Municipal Airport. The analysis is one of the first initiatives launched by a newly formed North Texas aviation committee.

The analysis is one of the first initiatives launched by a newly formed North Texas aviation committee. Funded by the Federal Aviation Administration, the study- and the Air Transportation Technical Advisory Committee- are facilitated by the region's 16-county metropolitan planning organization, North Central Texas Council of Governments.

A New York consultant hired to do the study, Clough Harbour & Associates LLP, started surveying at the Airport July 17. It's anticipated Clough will submit its analysis to the committee in late September, Wiggins said.

The committee chose Lancaster Airport specifically because it is surrounded today by farmland, but it's facing the prospect of rapid development. The committee also considered Addison Airport, Denton Airport and others around the region that are surrounded by varying amounts of urban development. Lancaster seemed like an opportunity to be proactive, Wiggins said.

"There is so much momentum building there at Lancaster and much of it has to do with transportation," she said.

The 306-acre Lancaster Airport is bordered by the cities of Lancaster, Wilmer, Hutchins and Ferris. It sits about a mile from Union Pacific Railroad Co.'s massive \$90 million intermodal rail and truck yard.

The airport is also bordered by the 6,000 acre Dallas Logistics Hub, which is now building some of its first anticipated 60 million square feet of industrial space. BNSF Railway Co. is also eyeing the area for a 490-acre intermodal terminal.

"Encroachment" can include anything built up around an airport that limits the airport from growing or interferes in some way with flights in or out, said Arb Rylant, Lancaster Airport manager.

That could include either noise restrictions necessitated by residential or commercial development, or physical obstructions, such as trees, buildings, power lines, cellular phone towers or windmills.

A private grass airstrip built in the 1970s, the field was transferred to the city in 1978.

The airport, which operates without an FAA tower, tallies about 65,000 takeoffs and landings annually, Rylant said. Some 220 aircraft are based at the field, including 12 vintage jets.

The city of Lancaster, which began a land study more than one year ago, is looking at special zoning around the airport to control encroachment, set height standards for buildings and mandate appropriate uses, said Jan Belcher, Lancaster's deputy city manager.

"Our City Council recognized the value of the airport to the city's future," Belcher said. "The city is being very proactive in trying to protect this asset."

The FAA has approved planning a 1,500 foot extensions an extension to 7,500 feet.

“The airport is being looked at as a future cargo-compatible airport,” Belcher said. “That is going to

take some planning. ... It’s my hope the encroachment study will help us approach the other cities around the airport. It’s in all the cities around the airport. It’s in all the cities best interests to develop it compatibly.”

