

Airport expansion plans irk land owners

By ALICE O'CONNOR
For the Emerald

Plane travelers are often surprised at the miniature size of Eugene's city-owned airport, but a full-scale expansion plan should change its look.

The Mahlon Sweet Airport Master Plan, a revision of the plan adopted by the city council in 1972, calls for \$18 million in improvements by the year 2000.

The plan, prepared by a San Francisco firm, surveys existing airport facilities, forecasts future usage of airport facilities, recommends improvements and estimates costs.

Mahlon Sweet, located on 1,500 acres northwest of Eugene and west of Highway 99N, currently operates a crowded passenger terminal for United, Hughes Air West, Frontier and Air Oregon airlines.

The airport also houses 18 corporate aircraft and several hundred smaller aircraft. It provides sales, servicing, flight instruction, rental charters, and offers two aviation shops.

The plan includes consideration of effects on the environment and protection of aircraft approaches and clear zones.

The San Francisco firm says the airport will reach its operational capacity by 1985, and a new general aviation runway will be required to handle the additional air traffic.

The package plan includes an expanded terminal building and parking area, a new runway east of Green Hill Road, more hangars and aircraft parking spaces, a taller control tower, a radar station and a new fire station, says airport operations manager Larry Schoelerman.

There is disagreement as to whether the airport should be included within the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan Area General Plan — currently under consideration by Eugene, Springfield and Lane County.

The metropolitan plan recommends that local governments control development within the airport environment in order to minimize impact upon the population and ensure that development doesn't interfere with air space needs.

Encroachment of land development around the airport is a major concern, says airport manager Bob Shelby.

Property owners say they are unhappy with the prospects of including zoning in the vicinity of the airport within the metropolitan plan because they will be prohibited from developing their land.

Eugene lawyer Ray Fachtel says the city shouldn't discourage private development of the land if it doesn't intend to buy it.

Vernon Gleaves, a Eugene attorney representing a property owner, says he doesn't think the airport has enough information to support inclusion of the land for airport use within the metropolitan plan.

Other landowners argue that their locations are convenient for business purposes provided by airport carrier services.

But business demands will increase service demands and demand placed upon the environment.

Bruce Chase, chairer of the aviation committee of the Eugene Area Chamber of Commerce, says the city has historically controlled growth near the airport by limiting services.

Chase says no sewage system could currently support additional motels, restaurants and businesses.

If people work near the airport, lack of services won't interfere with inevitable growth, Schoelerman says. People are going to say, "I work out there, why not live out there?"

The airport will have to bear the cost burden of retrofitting (insulating) houses with thicker glass, double-pane windows and so on, he says.

Building contractors will be required to use special insulation materials which will be more costly for them, Schoelerman says.

The airport plan also calls for "noise contours" set by the FAA which would prevent residential development within noise-sensitive areas.

Gleaves says his client is aware of the potential noise problem, but it isn't enough of a problem to negate possibilities for a future business development.

Land owners argue that because they aren't in the flight path, because they will build attractive developments, and because they use the airport they have a right to develop their land.

But developers may have to deal with congestion from increased useage.

The number of commercial airline passengers using Mahlon Sweet is expected to increase to 568,000 annually by the year 2000, compared with 186,000 in 1977. Total aircraft take-offs and landings at Mahlon Sweet are also expected to increase — to about 395,000 annually by the turn of the century, compared with 170,000 in 1977.

Last summer the FAA changed its ruling so that "simultaneous approaches" to the runway are no longer allowed. This has resulted in greater air congestion, Schoelerman says.

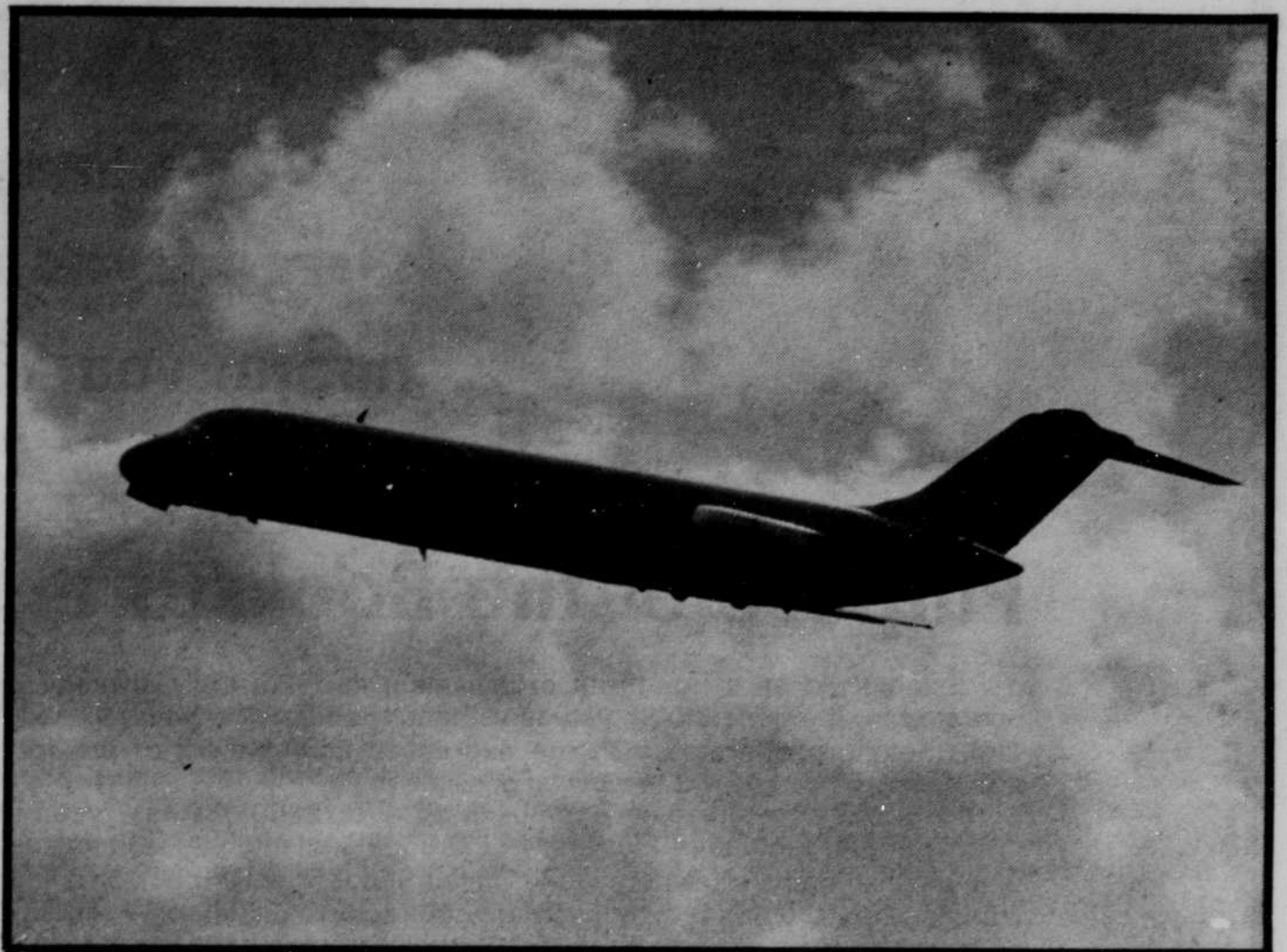


Photo by Jimmi Harris

Eugene's Mahlon Sweet Airport is preparing for increased air traffic with a plan to double its capacity.

Although Mahlon Sweet hasn't received any indication from the FAA that congestion problems pose "current hazards," Schoelerman says the airport expects to have radar installed within 12 to 18 months.

The radar facility for air traffic

control purposes has been purchased from the Fairchild Air Force Base in Spokane, Wash. Currently, the airport uses a radar link-up system, which is tied with Seattle radar operations.

Once the expansion plan has been accepted, two to three

years will be needed to examine architects' bids. Full expansion plans probably won't get underway until 1982 or 1983, Schoelerman says.

The airport commission will review the plan before it goes to the city council for consideration in December.

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