

## **Background on Better Airports Research**

The three major airports in the New York-New Jersey-Connecticut metropolitan region (the Region) are nearing their capacity limits. There are many manifestations. LaGuardia Airport runway capacity is oversubscribed, limiting travel choices. And at Newark the close spacing of the parallel runways prevents simultaneous independent operations, limiting airport capacity and efficiency.

The gap between capacity and demand is increasing stress on both the ground and airside facilities at the three airports, on ground access capacity and on the Region's airspace. This is leading to severe reliability and delay problems that pose a serious threat to the economy of the Region.

Projections and long-term trends indicate that air passenger demand, 107 million annual enplaned passengers, could grow to 125 million in 2015 and 150 million by 2030. To put this in perspective, this growth of 43 million in the next 21 years represents more air travelers than are served by any one of the three airports today.

The growth and spread of population and employment over the last few decades, and the projection of the continuation of that trend, will increase the role of other airports in accommodating the demands for air travel to and from the New York Region.

To accommodate this growth, aircraft size has to grow so that existing runway capacity can accommodate more people, yet smaller jets make more non-stop service viable, increasing the pressure for additional runway capacity in the peak periods. Multiple low-fare airlines have emerged to capture niche markets and expand the demand for gate and runway space. Intercity rail has improved, yet has not achieved its full promise. Intercity highways, air travel's chief modal rival are clogged as well. Air cargo is a growing element of airport use, as just-in-time deliveries become the default business model. And security concerns and crowding have made air travel more stressful.

Expansion opportunities at the three major New York regional airports are limited by airspace, land availability, environmental constraints, community opposition and highway congestion.

It will become increasingly critical for the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, and others concerned about the economy and competitiveness of the New York Region, to understand and weigh decisions based upon the relative costs and impacts of possible investments and policy decisions that might be needed to alter or to accommodate these trends.

The Port Authority, in cooperation with the New York State Department of Transportation and the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, has completed the [FAA Regional Air Service Demand Study](#) that evaluated the use of six alternative airports in a 54 county region as relievers to the three major airports - Newark, LaGuardia and Kennedy. As part of that study, a major data collection effort was undertaken that determined the characteristics of passengers at both the three major and at the six potential reliever airports. The data was used to develop an airport choice model that estimates the use of each airport under alternative assumptions. The model is capable of

estimating passenger demand and the supply of air service based on a wide variety of "what-if" assumptions. These assumptions can vary the capacity of the airports to handle passenger and aircraft activity, or the capability of the region's ground transportation system to move passengers to a more distant airport in a shorter time. Both changing policies and capital investments will be necessary to resolve the airside and landside limitations on the growth of air travel in the New York Region. These actions will require the support of the body politic, and will therefore require a greater public understanding of the complex choices available to remedy the full range of airport capacity problems and their solutions.

The regional discussion among government, business, labor, civic and environmental leaders in the Region will require an open dialogue about the alternatives to address the airport capacity problem, with clear information about the trade-offs among alternative actions, including the costs and benefits and the economic and environmental impacts of the choices the Region faces.

Another key question is the potential of intercity rail as a means of diverting air passenger traffic from the region's airports thereby reducing air traffic congestion. Diverting meaningful amounts of passenger traffic from the region's airports to rail will require equally significant improvements in speed, reliability and corridor capacity, which will require both capital investments and changes in the way the rail system is currently operated.

### **Regional Plan Association's Historic Airport Role**

Regional Plan Association has a long history of involvement in planning the future of the Region's airports. In 1947, responding to the then growing airport capacity and governance crisis, RPA issued *Airports of Tomorrow*, a blueprint for airport development and governance that has guided the growth of the three airport system in the Region. The report was adopted as official policy and led to the agreement to have the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey as the agency to guide the development of the Region's airports. The report was developed with the guidance of the partnership - The Regional Airport Conference - a consortium of the major federal, state, city and county government stakeholders and convened and staffed by RPA.

In 1969 RPA issued *The Region's Airports* that described the steps necessary to assist in accommodating airport passenger growth in the Region focusing on pricing, alternative ground opportunities, and an eventual "fourth" airport. This report was updated four years later in *The Region's Airports Revisited*, which accounted for changing trends and the emergence of Stewart Airport as a viable option of added capacity.

In 1992 RPA issued a report, *Two Airport Issues*, which highlighted the issue of rail access to the airports and the reason for inaction, and secondly of the potential role of Stewart Airport in the Region.

Since *The Region's Airports Revisited* 33 years ago the aviation industry has changed in many ways. Airport passenger demand has grown by 60 million passengers a year, or by 150 percent, putting pressure on landside and ground access facilities. In response, RPA has campaigned for improved rail access to Kennedy and Newark Airports, and worked

closely with the Port Authority to build public, media and political support for the JFK AirTrain.

Decision-making in our complex, multi-agency society with the broad range of public and private stakeholders can be exceedingly difficult. It is no longer possible to move forward without a process to reach agreement, much as was done with the Regional Airport Conference. We propose to replicate that process with the advantage of modern planning and communication tools.

Regional Plan Association is highly qualified -- indeed uniquely qualified - to assist the Port Authority and the many stakeholders and decision-makers in the Region in meeting the airport capacity challenge. Our focus is regional, long-term and multi-disciplinary. Our Region extends throughout the tri-state area, but as issues have extended beyond that - in the northeast corridor, into Pennsylvania and in the entire northeast mega-region - so too have we extended our areas of concern, inquiry and advocacy. Our focus is on the consequences of public and private actions over the long term, unlike most public and private entities that must be concerned about either their current budget year or stock price. Our focus is not only on transportation issues, but the inter-related issues of housing, open space, land use, design, the environment, and the economy. And probably most important for this project, our culture is participatory, since only through the engagement of a large and diverse group of stakeholders will significant progress be made.

### **Our Current Study - The Future of the Region's Airports**

With this initiative, RPA seeks to establish a communications process backed by careful and credible analysis that will build trust among stakeholders and the general public. All alternatives will be fairly evaluated, including their costs, benefits and impacts, and how well the alternatives, singly and in combination address the airport congestion problem. The goal is to develop a set of actions that gains broad acceptance among many players.

RPA is prepared to address these issues, in cooperation with the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, by building on the outreach model of the Regional Airport Conference, but updating and modifying it to reflect the more expansive range of stakeholders found in today's decision-making climate.