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Airport Transportation: The Search for Benefits of Rural Airports

**Ken Casavant, Eric Jessup, and Jon Newkirk
School of Economic Sciences
Washington State University**

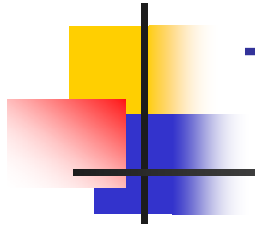


The Project

- Commissioned by the WSDOT Aviation Division.
- I-O and other economic analysis methods do not fully recognize many of the benefits associated with rural airports.
- Study was designed to complement the Washington State Aviation Forecast by looking outside traditional economic analysis to identify the benefits of rural airports.

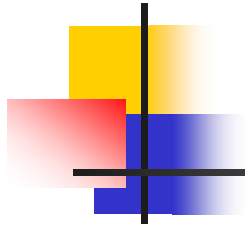


Team at work!



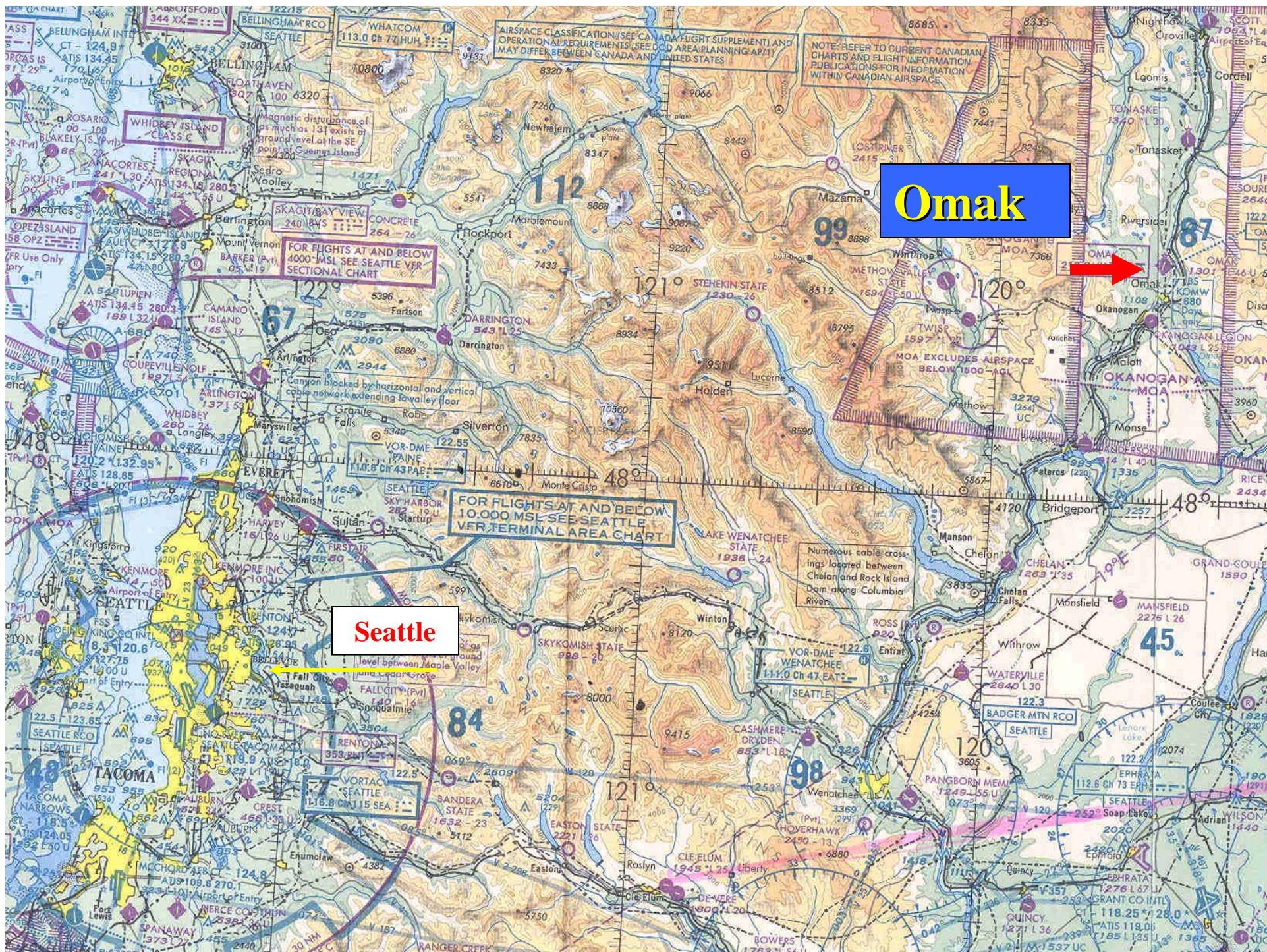
The Benefits of Rural Airports

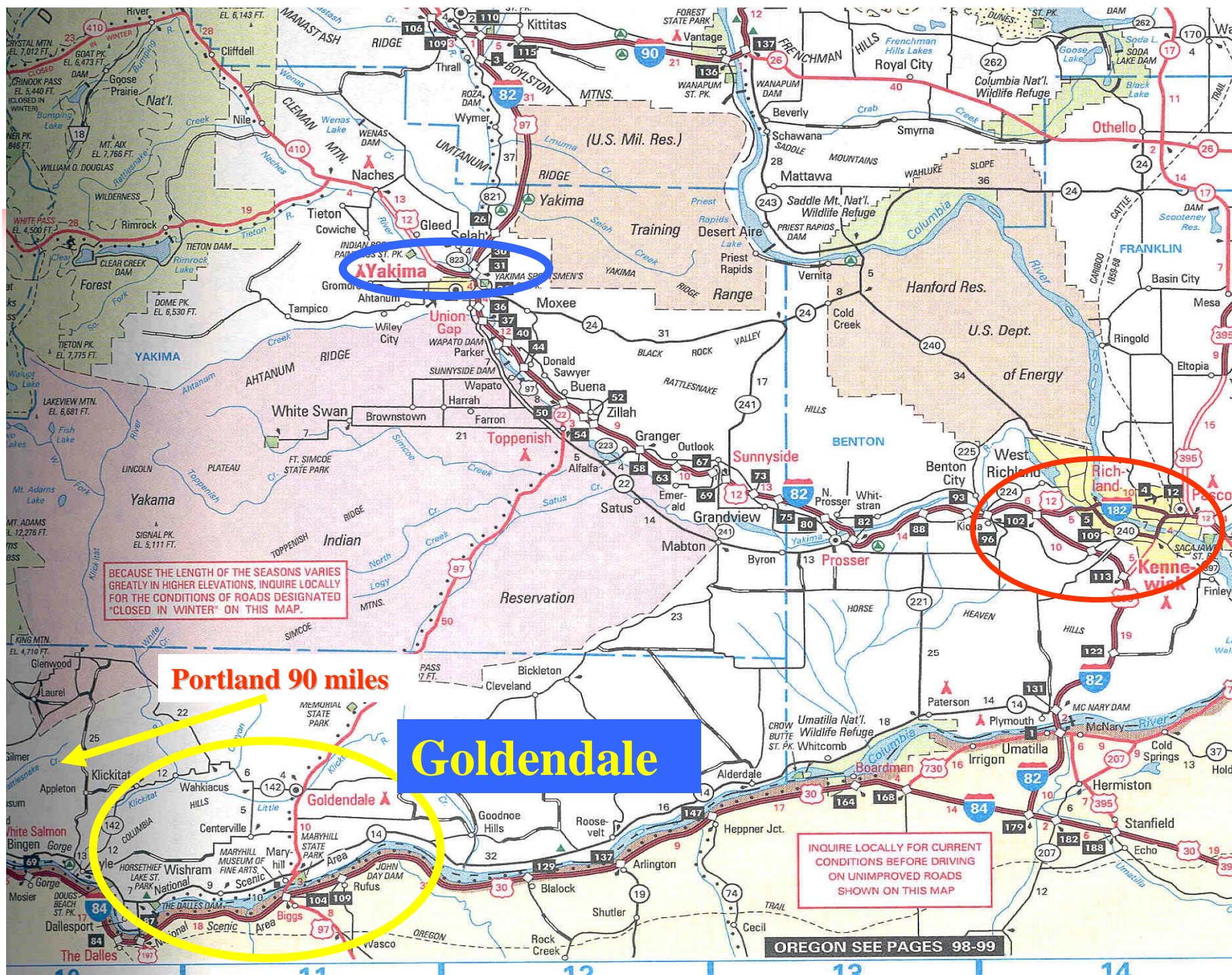
- The economic benefits of airports are well recognized for primary, commercial service, reliever and urban general aviation airports.
- Less well known or understood are the benefits provided by rural airports.
 - “Rural airports are invisible until you need them”



Rural Airports

- A need to understand why rural airports are essential public facilities as defined by Washington State Law.
- Qualitative Research Methods provided the construct around which the project design was developed.
- Three case study communities were chosen to gain an understanding of the role played and benefits provided by rural airports to their communities.







Study Approach

■ Review of Literature

■ Interviews in each community

- Elected officials, community organization members, residents, hospital administrators, health care professionals, business owners, planners, economic development professionals, Tribal officials, airport managers, FBO's, pilots, aviation businesses, air ambulance operators, forest service employees, newspaper editors, teachers, social workers, and fire air tanker crews.

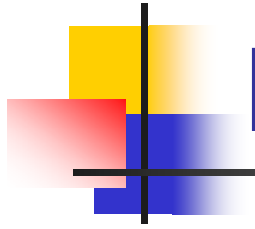
■ Focus groups

- Pilots
- Economic development groups.



What did we find?

The image of General Aviation airports primarily dedicated to the recreation of flying is incorrect.



Emerging Themes

- Economic Development and Airports – “The Box That Must Be Checked”
- Health Care – Emergency Medical Services
“The airport was invisible until I needed it.”
- Business and Commerce
- Public Safety, Disaster and Emergency Response
- Enriching Community Life



Benefits are derived from the many reasons flights are made.

- Drawing from the transportation demand construct in that the demand for transportation is derived from the demand to move goods or people . . .
- Flights to and from most general aviation airports are undocumented.
- Focus groups of pilots and all interviewees were asked to identify the reasons they knew flights had been made from the rural airports in their area.



Benefits are derived from the many reasons flights are made.

Agriculture and Timber Related

- Agricultural spraying

- Field and crop inspections

- Flights to purchase farm equipment

- Searching for cattle

- Attend farm auctions

- Cattle buyer traveling weekly to cattle auction

- Farm to town flights for parts, banking, groceries

- Timber harvesting

- (use of helicopters to transport cedar bolts)

- Forest inspections



Benefits are derived from the many reasons flights are made.

Business Support

Banking

Apartment building owner flies in maintenance personnel

Architects flown in

Environmental and civil engineers flown in for construction projects

Flights to business meetings

Flights bringing lawyers with legal specialties necessary for contract negotiations

Flights of news gathering teams

Flights transporting management or employees for business related flights

power plants,

land fills,

large retail chains,

independently owned retail businesses,

tire stores,

timber products industry

tourism businesses

construction products business

ETC.



- Air ambulance - both rotary and fixed wing (numerous!)
- Fire, flood, search and rescue, and public safety response.
 - Airport: Real estate where flight activities can be supported, are pre-approved, and flight procedures are already adopted.



Benefits are derived from the many reasons flights are made.

Health Care System

Attend medical education conferences

Commute to rural hospital by emergency room physician

Emergency medical airlifts (numerous flights and reasons cited)

Flights bringing in specialized medical equipment

Flights delivering blood, tissue, or bone for transplant

Hospital consultants for equipment installation, financing, hospital design

Movement of organs harvested from local donors

Transport of local residents needing organ transplant

Bringing in specialists, i.e. cardiologists, prosthesis technician

Angel Flight - transport for patients needing treatment in urban centers

Angel Flight - return patients home after med evac to urban treatment center



Benefits are derived from the many reasons flights are made.

Local Quality Of Life

- Commute to work
- Scenic flights
- Flights to Father's Day and other annual Fly Ins
- Flew 80 year old father to family reunion
(Use for family reunions and family visits was a recurring theme.)
- Transport of grandchildren between divorced parents
- Flight to religious meeting
- Flights following the Lewis and Clark Trail
- Flights for viewing the area for prospective pastors, physicians
- Flights to bring home accident victims
- Specialty puppy pick-up using business class jets by individuals from New York and Dallas
- Transport passengers to airports with scheduled airline service
- ETC...



Activities including the community.



The benefits to rural communities include the following:

- Enhanced quality of life;
- Access to needed professional services;
- Improved quality of healthcare;
- Effective and timely response to disasters, emergencies and fires;



The benefits to rural communities include the following:

- Support for local businesses including agriculture and timber businesses;
- Improved ability to petition government;
- Community life enriched;
- Critical asset for economic development;
- An improved sense of well being.



Economic development including entrepreneurs and leading edge development – a quiet airplane in process!



Findings

- Rural airports are integrated into the life of rural communities.
 - While not numerous, flights or activities associated with airports occur regularly that are key to health care, disaster and emergency response, business, public safety, economic development, local, state, and federal government, community life, and other quality of life factors.
 - Rural airports are a necessary component of the infrastructure supporting the health, welfare, public safety, and economic well being of the residents of rural communities – I.e. an “essential public facility”.



Access is Critical

- Rural airports are an important point of access to medical centers and the specialists in other fields that are required for business, commerce, and government.
 - Rural communities *must* maintain access to the centers where medical and non-medical specialists, parts inventories, and treatment technologies are found.
 - The health care system is the best example of this trend, although engineers, lawyers, investment bankers, developers, scientists, and other professionals use the airports in these communities.
 - **Time is the commodity!**



Findings

- Rural airports are a key component of the economic development strategies in each of these communities.
 - The economy of rural Washington, dependent on mining, forestry, and agriculture, has lagged well behind the urban economy – most rural communities are struggling to find the solution to their economic future.
 - The airports symbolizes the “hope” for the future in Forks and are the center of their development strategy.
 - The airports in Omak and Goldendale/Dallesport are believed to be important to their development potential.
 - The airports have become a symbol for their residents that theirs is a progressive community.



Findings

- The benefits to rural communities from the activities that occur as a result of their having a rural airport are many although often out of view of community residents.
- Many of the benefits are of a nature that make their value to the community difficult to quantify but are real.



Findings

- Not having an airport would decrease the quality of health care, decrease the odds of having a viable economic future, reduce the ability of local, state and federal agencies to be able to respond to disasters and emergencies, and would diminish the image these communities have of themselves.