



A small private jet rolls along the tarmac after landing at Watsonville Municipal Airport.

Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

Airport master plan gets off ground

Airports

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Deadline for public comment on EIR set for Oct. 14

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The long-awaited master plan and environmental impact report for the Watsonville Municipal Airport have been released.

The master plan projects what the airport's needs and growth will be over a 20-year span. Such plans

are required from airports that wish to receive funding through the Federal Aviation Administration, such as Airport Improvement Program monies, which the Watsonville facility currently receives.

Originally scheduled for release in 1995, the 2001-2020 plan includes plans for an 800-foot runway extension, construction of 100 new hangars, and an upgrade to an instrument landing system.

The landing system upgrade would allow more planes to land at the airstrip when the area is

shrouded in fog. The new hangars are much needed, said airport manager Don French. Plans call for storage units for a projected 100 additional aircraft to be built gradually over the course of the next two decades.

As for the runway extension, "(It) is not designed to bring in bigger, larger aircraft," said French. "It had to do with a technicality in what they call balanced fielding." At its current length the runway can accommodate two jet aircraft, but only one is permitted to be full-

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ly fueled. Extending the airstrip would allow two fully fueled jets.

The projected improvements will help Watsonville's airport continue to meet the flourishing demand for small-craft service, said French, particularly as the FAA works to reduce small plane traffic at larger commercial "hubs" like the San Jose and San Francisco international airports.

"Because the hubs are getting busier and busier, the needs for the smaller satellite airports are going to increase dramatically," with an emphasis on making the hubs faster, quieter, more efficient," French predicted. "If they can reduce the smaller aircraft going into places like San Jose and San Francisco, they can increase the number of

commercial aircraft landing there."

The airport's master plan was originally scheduled for release in 1995. French said its completion was delayed primarily by the need to develop an environmental mitigation plan for wetlands and endangered plants on the property, such as the Santa Cruz tarplant, popcorn plant and coastal terrace prairie grass.

"Creating a mitigation plan that was acceptable to the agencies that oversee these things was a very time-consuming process," said French. But since the airport is still operating under FAA auspices established in 1986, he added, "We felt no rush to get another plan in place."

The City of Watsonville released both the master plan and EIR on Friday, Aug. 30 and put out a press release announcing the move on Sept. 12.

The 45-day public review peri-

od for the EIR will end at 5 p.m. on Monday, Oct. 14. Thereafter, the City Council will review and hold public hearings on the master plan. Comments on the plan will be accepted up until the City Council decides what action to take. Once approved by the council, the plan is scheduled to take effect immediately.

The master plan and EIR are available for review at the Watsonville main library and Freedom branch library, online at www.ci.watsonville.ca.us (click on "Departments," then select "Airport"), and at the Community Development Department, located in City Hall at 250 Main St.

The Community Development office also has print and CD-ROM versions of the documents available for purchase. The master plan costs \$46; EIR costs \$40; CD-ROMs are \$2.50 each.